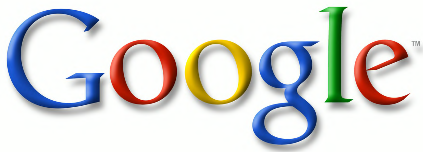

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CLARET AND OLIVES,

FROM

THE GARONNE TO THE RHONE;

OR,

NOTES, SOCIAL, PICTURESQUE, AND LEGENDARY, BY THE WAY.

BY ANGUS B. REACH,

AUTHOR OF "THE STORY OF A BUCCANEER," ETC.

LONDON: DAVID BOGUE, FLEET STREET.

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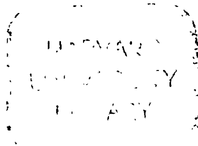

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TO

CHARLES MACKAY, Esq., LL. D.,

MY EARLIEST AND KINDEST LITERARY FRIEND,

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CLARET AND OLIVES.

CHAPTER I.

THE DILIGENCE—OLD GUIENNE AND THE ENGLISH IN FRANCE—BORDEAUX AND A SUBURBAN VINTAGING.

"*Voila la voila! La ville de Bordeaux!*"

The conductor's voice roused me from the dreamy state of dose in which I lay, luxuriously stretched back amid cloaks and old English railway-wrappers, in the roomy banquette of one of the biggest diligences which ever rumbled out of Caillard and Lafitte's yard.

"*Voila! la Voila!*" The bloused peasant who drove the six stout nags therewith stirred in his place; his long whip whistled and cracked; the horses flung up their heads as they broke into a canter, and their bells rang like a joy peal; while Niniche, the con-

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ductor's white poodle, which maintained a perilous footing in the leathern hood of the banquette, pattered and scratched above our heads, and barked in recognition of his master's voice.

I rubbed my eyes and looked. We were on the ridge of a wooded hill. Below us lay a flat green plain, carpetted with vines. Right across it ran the broad, white, chalky highway, powdering with dust the double avenue of chesnuts which lined it. Beyond the plain glittered a great river, crowded with shipping, and beyond the river rose stretching, apparently for miles, a magnificent façade of high white buildings, broken here and there by the foliage of public gardens, and the dark embouchures of streets; while, behind the range of quays, and golden in the sunrise, rose high into the clear morning air, a goodly array of towering Gothic steeples, fretted and pinnacled up to the glancing weather-cocks. It was, indeed, Bordeaux.

The long journey from Paris was all but over, yet though I had been tired enough of the way, I felt as if I could brave it again, rather than make the exertion of encountering octroi officers, and plunging into strange hotels. For after all, comfortable Diligence travelling makes a man lazy. It is slow, but you get accustomed to the slowness; in the banquette, too, you are never cramped; there is luxurious roominess behind, and you plunge your legs in straw up to the knees. Then leaning supinely back, you indulge a serene passiveness, rolling lazily on with the rumbling mountain of a vehicle. The thunder of the heavy wheels, and the low monotonous clash,

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clash, clash, of the hundred grelots, form a soothing atmosphere of sound about you, and musingly, and dreamingly you watch the action of the team—these half dozen little but stout tough work-a-day horses, trotting manfully in their rough harness, while the driver—oh, how different from our old coaching dandies!—a clumsy peasant, in sabots, and a stable-smelling blouse, sits slouched, and round-shouldered like a sack before you, incessantly flourishing that whistling whip, and shouting in the uncouth jargon of his province, to the jingling team below. And next you watch the country or the road. A French road, like a mathematical line, on, and on, and on, straight, straight, mournfully, dismally, straight, running like a tape laid across the bleak bare country, till it fades, and fades, and seems to tip over the horizon; or if you are in an undulating wooded district, you catch sections of it as it climbs each successive ridge; and you know that in the valleys it is just the same as on the hill tops. You see your dinner before you, as Englishmen say over roast mutton. You see your journey before you, as Frenchmen may say, over the slow trotting team. And how drear and deserted the country looks—open, desolate, and bare. Here and there a distant mite of a peasant or two bending over the sun-burnt clods. No cottages, but ever and anon a congregation of barns—the *bourgs* in which the small land-owners collect; now a witch of an old woman herding a cow; anon a solitary shepherd all in rags, knitting coarse stockings, and followed by a handful of sheep, long in the legs, low in the flesh, with thin dirty fleeces as ragged as their guardian's

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coat. Upon the road travellers are scanty. The bronzed Cantonier stares as you pass, his brass-lettered hat glittering in the glare. There go a couple of soldiers on furlough, tramping the dreary way to their native village, footsore, weary and slow, their hairy knapsacks galling their shoulders, and their tin canteens evidently empty. Another diligence, white with dust, meeting us. The conductors shout to each other, and the passengers crane their heads out of window. Then we overtake a whole caravan of *roulage*, or carriers, the well-loaded carts poised upon one pair of huge wheels, the horses, with their clumsy harness and high peaked collars, making a scant two miles an hour. Not an equipage of any pretension to be seen. No graceful phaeton, no slangy dog-cart, no cosey family carriage—only now and then a crawling local diligence, or M. le Curé on a shocking bad horse, or an indescribably dilapidated anomalous jingling appearance of a vague shandrydan. And so on from dawn till sunset, through narrow streeted towns, with lanterns swinging above our heads, and open squares with scrubby lime trees, and white-washed cafés all around; and by a shabby municipality with gilded heads to the front railings, a dilapidated tricolor, and a short-legged, red-legged sentinel, not so tall as his firelock, keeping watch over it; and then, out into the open, fenceless, hedgeless country, and on upon the straight unflinching road, and through the long, long tunnels of eternal poplar trees, and by the cantonnier, and the melancholy *bourgs*, and the wandering soldiers, and the dusty carriers' carts as before.

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One thing strikes you forcibly in these little country towns—the marvellously small degree of distinction of rank amid the people. No neighbouring magnate rattles through the lonely streets in the well-known carriage of the Hall or the Grange, graciously receiving the ready homage of the townspeople. No retired man of business, or bustling land-agent, trots his smart gig and cob—no half-pay officer goes gossipping from house to house, or from shop to shop. There is no banker's lady to lead the local fashions—no doctor, setting off upon his well-worked nag for long country rounds—no assemblage, if it be market day, of stout full-fed farmers, lounging, booted and spurred, round the Red Lion or the Plough. Working men in blouses, women of the same rank in the peasant head-dress of the country, and here and there a nondescript personage in a cap and shooting jacket, who generally turns up at the scantily-attended table d'hôte at dinner time—such are the items which make up the mass of the visible population. You hardly see an individual who does not appear to have been born and bred upon the spot, and to have no ideas and no desires beyond it. Left entirely to themselves, the people have vegetated in these dull streets from generation to generation, and, though clustered together in a quasi town—perhaps with octroi and mairie, a withered tree of liberty, and billiard tables by the half-dozen—the population is as essentially rural as though scattered in lone farms, unvisited, except on rent-day, by either landlord or agent. It often happens that a large landed proprietor has not even a house upon his ground. He lets the land,

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receives his rent, and spends it in Paris or one of the large towns, leaving his tenants to go on cultivating the ground in the jog-trot style of their fathers and their grandfathers before them. The French, in fact, have no notion of what we understand by the life of a country gentleman. A proprietor may pay a sporting visit to his land when partridge and quail are to be shot; but as to taking up his abode *au fond de ses terres,* mingling in what we would call county business, looking after the proceedings of his tenants, becoming learned, in an amateur way, in things bucolic, in all the varieties of stock and all the qualities of scientific manures—a life, a character, and a social position of this sort, would be in vain sought for in the rural districts of France. There are not, in fact, two more differing meanings in the world than those attached to our "Country Life," and the French *Vie de Chateau.* The French proprietor is a Parisian out of Paris. He takes the rents, shoots the quails, and the clowns do the rest.

An Englishman ought to feel at home in the south-west of France. That fair town, rising beyond the yellow Garonne, was for three hundred years and more an English capital. Who built these gloriously fretted Gothic towers, rising high into the air, and sentinelled by so many minor steeples? Why Englishmen! These towers rise above the Cathedral of St. Andrew, and in the Abbey of St. Andrew the Black Prince held high court, and there, after Poitiers, the captive King of France revelled with his conqueror, with the best face he might. There our Richard the Second was born. There the doughty Earl of Derby,

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long the English seneschal of Bordeaux, with his retinue, "amused themselves," as gloriously gossipping old Froissart tells, "with the citizens and their wives;" and from thence Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, went forth, being eighty-six years of age, mounted upon a little palfrey, to encounter the Duke of Anjou, in those latter days when our continental dominions were shrinking, as we deserved that they should shrink, after the brutal murder of the glorious Maid of Domremy. It is true that we are at this moment in the department of the Dordogne, and that when we cross the river we shall be in that of the Gironde. But we Englishmen love the ancient provinces better than the modern departments, which we are generally as bad at recognising, as we are in finding out dates by Thermidors and Brumaires. No, no, departments may do for Frenchmen, but to an Englishman the rich land we are crossing will ever be Guienne, the "Fair Dutchy," and part and parcel of old Aquitane, the dowry of Eleanor, when she wedded our second Henry.

Is it not strange to think of those old times, in which the English were loved in the Bourdelois—fine old name—and the French were hated, in which the Gascon feudal chiefs around protested that they were the "natural born subjects of England, which was so kind to them?" Let us turn to Froissart:—The Duke of Anjou having captured four Gascon knights, forced them, *nolens volens*, to take the oath of allegiance to the King of France, and then turned them about their business. The knights went straight to Bordeaux, and presented themselves before the seneschal of the

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Landes, and the mayor of the city, saying, "Gentlemen, we will truly tell you that before we took the oath, we reserved in our hearts our faith to our natural lord, the king of England, and for anything we have said or done, we never will become Frenchmen." Our gallant forefathers appear on the whole, to have led a joyous life in Guienne. In truth, their days and nights were devoted very much to feasting themselves, and plundering their neighbours: two pursuits into which their Gascon friends entered with heart and soul. It is quite delightful to read in Froissart, or Enguerrand de Monstrelet, how "twelve knights went forth in search of adventures," an announcement which may be fairly translated, into how a dozen of gentlemen with indistinct notions of *meum* and *tuum*, went forth to lay their chivalrous hands upon anything they could come across. Of course these trips were made into the French territory, and really they appear to have been conducted with no small degree of politeness on either side, when the English "harried" Limousin, or the French rode a foray into Guienne. The chivalrous feeling was strong on both sides, and we often read how such-and-such a French and English knight or squire did courteous battle with each other; the fight being held in honour of the fair ladies of the respective champions. Thus, not in Guienne, but in Touraine, when the English and the Gascons beleaguered a French town, heralds came forth upon the walls and made this proclamation :—"Is there any among you gentlemen, who for love of his lady is willing to try some feat of arms? If there be any such, here is Gauvin Micaille, a squire of

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the Beauce, quite ready to sally forth, completely armed and mounted, to tilt three courses with the lance, give three blows with the battle-axe, and three strokes with the dagger. Now look you, English, if there be none among you in love." The challenge was duly accepted. Each combatant wounded the other, and the Earl of Shrewsbury sent to the squire of Beauce his compliments, and a hundred francs. This last present takes somewhat away from the Amadis de Gaul, and Palmerin of England vein; but the student of the old chroniclers, particularly of the English in France, will be astonished to find how long the chivalric feeling and ceremonials co-existed with constant habits of plundering and unprovoked forays.

Another curious trait of our forefathers in Guienne is the early development of the English *brusquerie*, and haughtiness of manner to the Continentals. The Gascons put up, however, with many a slight, inasmuch as their over sea friends were such valiant plunderers, and they, of course, shared the spoils. Listen to the frank declaration of a Gascon gentleman who had deserted from the English to the French side. Some one asking him how he did, he answers: "Thank God, my health is very good; but I had more money at command when I made war for the king of England, for then we seldom failed to meet some rich merchants of Toulouse, Condom, La Reole, or Bergerac, whom we squeezed, which made us gay and *debonnair;* but that is at an end." The questioner replies: "Of a truth, that is the life Gascons love. They willingly hurt their neighbour."

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Not even all the plunder they got, however, could silence the grumblings of the native knights at the haughty reserve of the English warriors. "I," says the canon of Chimay, "was at Bordeaux when the Prince of Wales marched to Spain, and witnessed the great haughtiness of the English, who are affable to no other nation than their own. Neither could any of the gentlemen of Gascogny or Acquitaine obtain office or appointment in their own country, for the English said they were neither on a level with them, nor worthy of their society." So early and so strongly did the proud island blood boil up; while many an Englishman, to this good day, by his reserved and saturnine bearing among an outspoken and merry-hearted people, perpetuates the old reproach, and keeps up the old grievance.

All sensible readers will be gratified when I state that I have not the remotest intention of describing the archæology of Bordeaux, or any other town whatever. Whoever wants to know the height of a steeple, the length of an aisle, or the number of arches in a bridge, must betake themselves to Murray and his compeers. I will neither be picturesquely profound upon ogives, triforia, clerestorys, screens, or mouldings; nor magniloquently great upon the arched, the early pointed, the florid, or the flamboyant schools. I will go into raptures neither about Virgins nor Holy Families, nor Oriel windows, in the fine old cut-and-dry school of the traveller of taste, which means, of course, every traveller who ever packed a shirt into a carpet bag; but, leaving the mere archæology and carved stones alone in their glory, I will try to sketch

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living, and now and then historical, France—to move gossippingly along in the by-ways rather than the highways—always more prone to give a good legend of a grey old castle, than a correct measurement of the height of the towers; and always seeking to bring up, as well as I can, a varying, shifting picture, well thronged with humanity, before the reader's eye.

When I got to Bordeaux, the vintage time had just commenced, and having ever had a special notion that vintages were very beautiful and poetic affairs, and a still more confirmed taste and reverence for claret, it was my object to see as much of the vintage as I could—to see the juice rush from the grape, which makes so good a figure in the bottle. Letters of introduction I had none. But there is a knack of making one's own way—of making one's own friends as you go—in which I have tolerable confidence, and which did not fail me in the present conjuncture. First, to settle and make up my notions, I strolled vaguely about the city, buying local maps and little local guide-books. Bordeaux is emphatically what the French call a *riant* town, with plenty of air, and such pure, soft, bright, sunny air. In the centre of a broad grand *Place*,—dotted with very respectable trees for French specimens, emblazoned with gay parterres, sprinkled with orange shrubs in bloom, and holed with no end of round stone basins, in which dolphins and Neptunes spout from their bronze mouths the live-long day, and urns, and pillars, and Dianas, and Apollos stand all around—there rises upon his massive pedestal the graven image of a fat comfortable gentleman in the ample cloak and doublet of Louis

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Quatorze, knots of carven ribbons decorating his shoulders, and flowing locks descending from under his broad-brimmed, looped-up hat. This is the statue of a M. de Tournay, an ancient intendant of the province, who was almost the creator of modern Bordeaux. Under his auspices the whole tribe of dolphins and heathen gods and goddesses were invoked to decorate the city. He reared great sweeps of pillared and porticoed buildings, and laid out broad streets and squares, on that enormous scale so characteristic of

BORDEAUX.

the *grand monarque*. He made Bordeaux, indeed, at once vast, prim, and massively magnificent. The mercantile town got quite a courtly air; and when the tricolor no longer floatéd in St. Domingo, and the commerce of the Gironde declined, so that not much was left over and above the wine trade, which, as all the world knows, is the genteelest of all the traffics,

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Bordeaux became what it is—a sort of retired city, having declined business—quiet, and clean, and prim, and aristocratic. Such, at least, is the new town. With old Bordeaux, M. de Tournay meddled not; and when you plunge into its streets you leap at once from eighteenth century terraces into fourteenth century lanes and tortuous by-ways. Below you, rough, ill-paved, unclean, narrow thoroughfares; above, the hanging old houses of five ages ago, peaked gables, and long projecting eaves, and hanging balconies; quaint carvings in blackened wood and mouldering stone;—the true middle-age tenements, dreadfully ricketty, but gloriously picturesque—charming to look at, but woful to live in; deep black ravines of courts plunging down into the masses of piled up, jammed together dwellings; squalid, slatternly people buzzing about like bees; bad smells permeating every street, lane, and alley; and now and then the agglomeration of darksome dwellings clustering round a great old church, with its vast Gothic portals, and, high up, its carven pinnacles and grinning *goutieres*, catching the sunshine far above the highest of these high-peaked roofs. This is the Bordeaux of the English and the Gascons—the Bordeaux which has rung to the clash of armour—the Bordeaux which was governed by a seneschal—the Bordeaux through whose streets defiled,

> "With many a cross-bearer before,
> And many a spear behind,"

the christening procession of King Richard the Second.

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We shall step into one church, and only one, that of the Feuillans. There, upon a dark and massive pedestal, lies stretched the effigy of an armed man. His hands are clasped, his vizor up shows his peaked beard, and he is clad *cap-à-pied* in steel. Who was the doughty warrior, thus resting in his mail? Strange to say, no warrior at all; but the quietest and most peaceable of God's beings. He had an odd, pedantic father, who brought him up in strange Paganwise. The boy was never addressed but in Latin. He never had a mother-tongue. He was surrounded with a blockade of Latin speakers to keep afar off the profanation of French; he was mentally fed upon the philosophers and the poets of old Rome, and taught to weep for Seneca in the tub, as the nearest catastrophe which could touch his sympathies. Furthermore, his father, out of respect for his nerves, had him awakened every morning by the sound of soft music. Happily, even this sublimity of pedantry and pedagoguism was insufficient to ruin the native genius of Michael, Seigneur of Montaigne, whose "essays ought to lie in every cottage window."

I have said that I was in search of some one to introduce me to the vineyards and the vintagers. In a day or two I had pitched upon my landlord as my protector. His hotel was a very modest one, where never before, I do believe, had Englishmen come to make everything dear and disagreeable. The red boards of the aristocratic Murray were unknown in his *salle à manger.* He had n't an ounce of tea in his house, and very probably, if he had, he would have fried it with butter, and served it *à la* something

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or other. When I say he, however, I mean madame, not monsieur. The latter would have made a capital English innkeeper, but he was a very bad French one. My gentleman, who was more than six feet high, and a stately personage, was cut out for a "mine host." He would have presided in a bar—which means drinking a continued succession of glasses of ale—with uncommon effect, for his temperament was convivial and gossippy; but he had no vocation for the kitchen, which is the common sphere of a French innkeeper not of the first class, and where, under the proud denomination of the *chef*, and clad in white like a grimly ghost, he bustles among pipkins and stew-pans and skillets, and lifts little trap-doors in his smoky range, and peers down them at blue charcoal furnaces—over which the *plats* are simmering. Now my good landlord never troubled himself about these domestic matters; but he was very clever at standing on the outer steps of his door, smoking cigars; and, indeed, would stay very willingly there all day—at least, until he heard his wife's voice, upon which he would make a precipitate retreat to a neighbouring café, where he would drink *eau sucreé* and rattle dominoes on a marble table till dinner-time. With this worthy I formed a personal acquaintance, by buying from him, at the reasonable rate of six sous a-piece, a number of quaint brass-set flat stones, very like red and grey cornelians, and just as pretty, which it was the fashion in the days of the Directory to mount in watch-keys, and wear two at a time, one dangling from each fob. These stones arc picked up in great quantities from the light shingly

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soil, whereon ripens the grape, which is pressed into claret wine; and handsome and lustrous in themselves, they thus become a species of mementos of chateau Margaux and chateau Lafitte. To the landlord, then, I stated that I wished to see some vine-gathering.

"Could anything be more lucky? His particular friend M. So-and-so was beginning his harvesting that very day, and was going to give a dinner that very night on the occasion. I should go—he should go. A friend of his was M. So-and-so's friend; in fact, we were all friends together." The truth I suspect to be, that my ally was dreadfully in want of an excuse to go to the dinner, and he welcomed my application as the Israelites did manna in the desert. It was meat and drink and amusement to him, and off we went.

As I shall presently describe the real claret vintage upon a large scale, I shall pass the more quickly over my first initiation into the plucking of the grapes. But I passed a merry day, and eke a busy one. There are no idle spectators at a vintage—all the world must work; and so I speedily found myself, after being most cordially welcomed by a fat old gentleman, hoarse with bawling, in a pair of very dirty shirt-sleeves and a pouring perspiration—with a huge pair of scissors in my hand cutting off the bunches, in the midst of an uproarious troop of young men, young women, and children—threading the avenues between the plants—stripping, with wonderful dexterity, the clustered branches—their hands, indeed, gliding like dirty yellow serpents among the broad green leaves—and sometimes shouting out merry badinage, sometimes singing bits of strongly rhythmed

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melody in chorus, and all the time, as far as the feat could be effected, eating the grapes by handfuls. The whole thing was very jolly; I never heard more laughing about nothing in particular, more open and unblushing love-making, and more resolute quizzing of the good man, whose grapes were going partly into the baskets, tubs, pots, and pans, carried every few moments by the children and old people out of the green alleys to the pressing-tub, and partly into the capacious stomachs of the gatherers. At first I was dainty in my selection of the grapes to be chosen, eschewing the under-ripe and the over-ripe. A damsel beside me observed this. From her woolly hair and very dark but merry face, I imagined her to have a touch of Guadeloupe or Martinique blood. "Cut away," she said; "every grape makes wine."

"Yes—but the caterpillars—"

"They give it a body."

"Yes—but the snails—"

"O, save the snails, please do, for me!" said a little girl, holding out her apron, full of painted shells.

"What do you do with them?" I inquired.

"Boil them and eat them," said my juvenile friend.

I looked askance.

"You can't think how nice they are with vinegar!" said the mulatto girl.

I remembered our own appetite for periwinkles, and said nothing; but added my mite of snail-flesh to the collection.

I was talking to the lord of the vineyard, when some one—there was petticoats in the case—dashed

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at him from behind, and instantly a couple of han
clasped his neck, and one of them squashed a hu
bunch of grapes over his mouth and nose, rubbing
the burst and bleeding fruit as vigorously as if it we
a healing ointment, while streams of juice squirt
from between the fingers of the fair assailant, ai
streamed down the patron's equivocal shirt. Aft
being half burked, the good man shook his fist at tl
girl as she flew, laughing, down the alley; and the
resuming his talk with me, he said: "We call tha.
Faire des moustaches. We all do it at vintage time."
And ten minutes thereafter I saw the jolly old boy go
chasing an ancient crone of a pail-bearer, a bunch of
very ripe grapes in his hand, amid the delighted
hurrahs of all assembled.

Dinner was late, for it behoves vintagers to make the best of the daylight. The ordinary hired labourers dined, indeed, soon after noon; but I am talking of the feast of honour. It was served in a thinly-furnished, stone-paved, damp and dismal *salle à manger*. A few additional ladies with their beaux, grand provincial dandies, all of whom tried to outstrip each other in the magnificence of their waistcoats, had arrived from Bordeaux. It had been very hot, close weather for a day or two past, and everybody was imprecating curses on the heads of the musquitos. The ladies, to prove the impeachment, stripped their sleeves, and showed each other the bites on their brown necks; and the gentlemen swore that the scamps were biting harder and harder. Then came the host, in a magnificently ill-cut coat—all the agricultural interest could not have furnished a worse—

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and his wife, very red in the face, for she had cooked dinner for the vintagers and for us; and then our host's father, a reverend old man in a black velvet scull cap, and long silver hair. The dinner was copious, and, as may be conceived, by no means served in the style of the *café de Paris*. But *soupe, bouilli, roti*, the stewed and the fried, speedily went the way of all flesh. Everybody *trinque-ed* with everybody: the jingle of the meeting glasses rose even over the clatter of the knives and forks; the jolly host's heart grew warmer at every glass, and he issued imperious mandates for older and older wine. His comfortable wife, whose appetite had been affected by the cooking, made up for the catastrophe at the dessert. The old grandfather garrrulously narrated tales of wondrous vintages long ago. The waistcoats had all the scandal of Bordeaux at their finger ends; and the young ladies with the mosquito bites took to "making moustaches" on their male friends, with pancakes instead of grapes—a process by which the worthy host was, as usual, an especial sufferer.

As may be conceived, my respected landlord was far more in his element than at home with his wife. He eat more, drank more, talked more, and laughed more than any two men present. Afterwards he grew tender and sentimental, and professed himself to be an ardent lover of his kind—a proposition which I suspect he afterwards narrowed specially in favour of a most mosquito-ridden lady next him—to the high wrath of a waistcoat opposite, who said sarcastic and cutting things, which nobody paid any attention to; and the landlord, being really a good-looking and

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plausible fellow, went on conquering and to conquer, and drinking and being drunk to; until, under a glorious outburst of moonlight which paled the blinking candles on the table, the merry company broke up; and mine host of Bordeaux, after certain rather unsteady walking, suddenly stopped on the centre of the bridge, and refused to go further until he had told me a secret. This was said with vast solemnity and àplomb, so we paused together on the granite pavement, and, after looking mysteriously at the Garonne, the moon, and the dusky heights of Floriac, my companion informed me in a hoarse whisper that he should leave France, his native and beloved land, where he felt sure that he was not appreciated, and pitch his tent, "*la bas, en Angleterre, parceque les Anglais etaient si bons enfants!*"

"So ho!" thought I; "a strange reminiscence of the old Gascons." But on the morrow, my respectable entertainer had a bad headach, a yellow visage, and an entire forgetfulness of how he had got home at all.

MOUSTACHE AT THE VINTAGE

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CHAPTER II.

CLARET—AND THE CLARET COUNTRY.

THAT our worthy forefathers in Guienne loved good wine, is a thing not to be doubted—even by a tee-totaller. When the Earl of Derby halted his detachments, he always had a pipe set on broach for the good of the company; and it is to be presumed that he knew their tastes. The wines of the Garonne were also, as might be expected, freely imported into England:

> "Whit wyn of Oseye, and of Gascoyne,
> Of the Ruele, and of the Rochel wyn."

As far down, indeed, as Henry VIII.'s time you might get Gascony and Guienne wine for eightpence a gallon, and the comfortable word "claret" was well known early in the seventeenth century. One of its admirers, however, about that time gave odd reasons for liking it, to wit—"Claret is a noble wine, for it is the same complexion that noblemen's coats be of." This gentleman must have been a strenuous admirer of the aristocracy. The old Gascon growth was, however, in all probability, what we should now call coarse, rough wine. The district which is blessed by the growth of Chateau Margaux and Chateau Lafitte, was a stony desert. An old French local book gives an account of the "savage and solitary country of

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Medoc;" and the wines of the Bordelois, there is every reason to believe, were grown in the strong, loamy soil bordering the river. By the time that the magic spots had been discovered, blessed with the mystic properties which produce the Queen of Wine we had been saddled with—our tastes perverted, and our stomachs destroyed—by the woful Methuen treaty—heavy may it sit on the souls of Queen Anne, and all her wigged and powdered ministers—if, indeed, men who preferred port wine to claret can be conceived to have had any souls at all, worth speaking about—and thenceforth John Bull burnt the coat of his stomach, muddled the working of his brain, made himself bilious, dyspeptic, headachy, and nationally stupid, by imbibing a mixture of strong, coarse, wines, with a taste but no flavour, and bedevilled with every alcoholic and chemical adulteration, which could make its natural qualities worse than they were. See how our literature fell off. The Elizabethans quaffed sack, or "Gascoyne, or Rochel wyn;" and we had the giants of those days. The Charles II. comedy writers worked on claret. Port came into fashion—port sapped our brains—and, instead of Wycherly's *Country Wife*, and Vanbrugh's *Relapse*, we had Mr. Morton's *Wild Oats*, and Mr. Cherry's *Soldier's Daughter*. It is really much to the credit of Scotland, that she stood staunchly by her old ally, France, and would have nothing to do with that dirty little slice of the worst part of Spain—Portugal, or her brandified potations. In the old Scotch houses a cask of claret stood in the hall, nobly on the tap. In the humblest Scotch country tavern, the pewter

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tappit hen, holding some three quarts—think of that, Master Slender,—"reamed," *Anglice* mantled, with claret just drawn from the cask, and you quaffed it, snapping your fingers at custom-houses. At length, in an evil hour Scotland fell:

> "Bold and erect the Caledonian stood,
> Firm was his mutton, and his claret good;
> 'Let him drink port!' the English statesman cried.
> He drank the poison, and his spirit died!"

But enough of this painful subject. As Quin used to say, "Anybody drink port? No! I thought so: Waiter, take away the black strap, and throw it out."

Upon the principle, I suppose, of the nearer the church, the further from God, Bordeaux is by no means a good place for good ordinary wine; on the contrary, the stuff they give you for every-day tipple is positively poor, and very flavourless. In southern Burgundy, the most ordinary of the wines is capital. At Macon, for a quarter of a handful of sous they give you nectar; at the little town of Tain, where the Rhone sweeps gloriously round the great Hermitage rock, they give you something better than nectar for less. But the ordinary Bordeaux wine is very ordinary indeed; not quite so red-inky, perhaps, as the *Vin de Surenne*, which, Brillat Savarin says, requires three men to swallow a glassfull—the man who drinks, and the friends who uphold him on either side, and coax, and encourage him; but still meagre and starveling, as if it had been strained through something which took the virtue out of it. Of course, the best of

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wine can be had by the simple process of paying for it, but I am talking of the ordinary work-a-day tipple of the place.

A few days' lounging in Bordeaux over, and hearing that the vintage was in full operation, I put myself into a respectable little omnibus, and started for the true claret country. In a couple of hours I was put down at the door of the only auberge in the tiny village of Margaux, and to any traveller who may hereafter wish to visit the famous wine district, I cordially commend "The Rising Sun," kept by the worthy "Mere Cadillac." There you will have a bedroom clean and bright as a Dutch parlour; a grand old four-poster of the ancient regime, something between a bed and a cathedral; a profusion of linen deliciously white and sweet smelling; and *la Mere* will toss you up a nice little potage, and a cotelette done to a turn, and an omelette which is perfection; and she will ask you, in the matter of wine, whether you prefer *ordinaire* or *vieux?* and when you reply, *Vieux et du meilleur,* she will presently bustle in with a glorious long-necked, cobwebby flask, the first glass of which will induce you to lean back in a tranquil state of general happiness, and contemplate with satisfaction even the naughty doings of the wicked Marguerite of Burgundy, and her sisters Blanche and Henriette, with Buridan and Gaulnay, in the *Tour de Nesle*—illustrations of which popular tragedy deck the walls on every side.

While thus agreeably employed, then, I may enlighten you with a few topographical words about the claret district. Look at the map, and you will

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observe a long tract of country, dotted with very few towns or villages, called the Landes, stretching along the sea coast from the Pyrenees to the mouth of the Gironde. At one place the Landes are almost sixty miles broad, but to the north they fine gradually away, the great river Garonne shouldering them, as it were, into the sea. Now these Landes (into which we will travel presently) are, for the most part, a weary wilderness of pine-wood, morasses, sand-deserts, and barren shingle. On the other hand, the low banks of the Garonne are generally of a fat, loamy, and black soil, called, locally, ***Palus***. Well, between the Palus and the Landes, there is a longish strip of country from two to five miles broad, a low ridge or backbone, which may be said to be the neutral and blending point of the sterile Landes and the fat and fertile Palus. And truth to tell, the earth seems as if the influence of the latter had much to do to bear up against the former. A Norfolk farmer would turn with a contemptuous laugh from the poor-looking stony soil. "Why," says he, "it's all sand, and gravel, and shingle, and scorched with the sun. You would not get a blade of chickweed to grow there." The proprietors of Medoc would be very glad if this latter assertion were correct, for the weeding of the vineyards form no inconsiderable item in the expense of cultivation; but this much may be safely predicted of this strange soil, that it would not afford the nourishment to a patch of oats, which that modest grain manages to extract from the bare hill-side of some cold, bleak, Highland croft, and yet that it furnishes the influence which produces grapes yielding

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the most truly generous and consummately flavoured wine ever drank by man since Noah planted the first vine slip.

You have now finished the bottle of Vieux. Up, and let us out among the vineyards. A few paces clears us of the little hamlet of Margaux, with its constant rattle of busy coopers, and we are fairly in the country. Try to catch the general *coup d'œil.* We are in an unpretending pleasant-looking region, neither flat nor hilly—the vines stretching away around in gentle undulations, broken here and there by intervening jungles of coppice-wood, by strips of black firs, or by the stately avenues and ornamental woods of a first-class chateau. Gazing from the bottoms of the shallow valleys, you seem standing amid a perfect sea of vines, which form a monotonous horizon of unvaried green. Attaining the height beyond, distant village spires rise into the air—the flattened roofs and white walls of scattered hamlets gleam cheerfully forth from embowering woods of walnut trees—and the expanse of the vineyards is broken by hedged patches of meadow land, affording the crops of coarse natural hay, upon which are fed the slowly-moving, raw-boned oxen which you see dragging lumbering wains along the winding dusty way.

And now look particularly at the vines. Nothing romantic in their appearance, no trellis work, none of the embowering, or the clustering, which the poets are so fond of. Here, in two words, is the aspect of some of the most famous vineyards in the world.

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Fancy open and unfenced expanses of stunted-looking, scrubby bushes, seldom rising two feet above the surface, planted in rows upon the summit of deep furrow ridges, and fastened with great care to low,

fence-like lines of espaliers, which run in unbroken ranks from one end of the huge fields to the other. These espaliers or lathes are cuttings of the walnut-trees around, and the tendrils of the vine are attached to the horizontally running stakes with withes, or thongs of bark. It is curious to observe the vigilant pains and attention with which every twig has been supported without being strained, and how things are arranged so as to give every cluster as fair a chance as possible of a goodly allowance of sun. Such, then, is the general appearance of matters; but it is by no means perfectly uniform. Now and then you find a patch of vines unsupported, drooping, and straggling, and sprawling, and intertwisting their branches like beds of snakes; and again, you come into the district of a new species of bush, a thicker, stouter affair, a grenadier vine, growing to at least six feet, and sup-

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ported by a corresponding stake. But the low, two-feet dwarfs are invariably the great wine givers. If ever you want to see a homily, not read, but grown by nature, against trusting to appearances, go to Medoc and study the vines. Walk and gaze, until you come to the most shabby, stunted, weazened, scrubby, dwarfish, expanse of snobbish bushes, ignominiously bound neck and crop to the espaliers like a man on the rack—these utterly poor, starved, and meagre-looking growths, allowing, as they do, the gravelly soil to show in bald patches of grey shingle through the straggling branches—these contemptible-looking shrubs, like paralysed and withered raspberries, it is which produce the most priceless, and the most inimitably flavoured wines. Such are the vines which grow Chateau Margaux at half a sovereign the bottle. The grapes themselves are equally unpromising. If you saw a bunch in Covent Garden you would turn from them with the notion that the fruiterer was trying to do his customer, with over-ripe black currants. Lance's soul would take no joy in them, and no sculptor in his senses would place such meagre bunches in the hands and over the open mouths of his Nymphs, his Bacchantes, or his Fauns. Take heed, then, by the lesson, and beware of judging of the nature of either men or grapes by their looks. Meantime, let us continue our survey of the country. No fences or ditches you see—the ground is too precious to be lost in such vanities—only, you observe from time to time a rudely carved stake stuck in the ground, and indicating the limits of properties. Along either side of the road

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the vines extend, utterly unprotected. No raspers, no ha-ha's, no fierce denunciations of trespassers, no polite notices of spring guns and steel traps constantly in a state of high go-offism—only, when the grapes are ripening, the people lay prickly branches along the way-side to keep the dogs, foraging for partridges among the espaliers, from taking a refreshing mouthful from the clusters as they pass; for it seems to be a fact that everybody, every beast, and every bird, whatever may be his, her, or its nature in other parts of the world, when brought among grapes, eats grapes. As for the peasants, their appetite for grapes is perfectly preposterous. Unlike the surfeit-sickened grocer's boys, who, after the first week loathe figs, and turn poorly when sugar-candy is hinted at, the love of grapes appears literally to grow by what it feeds on. Every garden is full of table vines. The people eat grapes with breakfast, lunch, dinner, and supper, and between breakfast, lunch, dinner, and supper. The labourer plods along the road munching a cluster. The child in its mother's arms is tugging away with its toothless gums at a bleeding bunch; while as for the vintagers, male and female, in the less important plantations, Heaven only knows where the masses of grapes go to, which they devour, labouring incessantly at the *metier*, as they do, from dawn till sunset.

A strange feature in the wine country is the wondrously capricious and fitful nature of the soil. A forenoon's walk will show you the earth altering in its surface qualities almost like the shifting hues of shot silk—gravel of a light colour fading into gravel of a

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dark—sand blending with the mould, and bringing it now to a dusky yellow, now to an ashen grey—strata of chalky clay every now and then struggling into light only to melt away into beds of mere shingle—or bright semi-transparent pebbles, indebted to the action of water for shape and hue. At two principal points these blending and shifting qualities of soil put forth their utmost powers—in the favoured grounds of Margaux, and again, at a distance of about fifteen miles further to the north, in the vineyards of Lafitte, Latour, and between these latter, in the sunny slopes of St. Jullien. And the strangest thing of all is, that the quality—the magic—of the ground changes, without, in all cases, a corresponding change in the surface strata. If a fanciful and wilful fairy had flown over Medoc, flinging down here a blessing and there a curse upon the shifting shingle, the effect could not have been more oddly various. You can almost jump from a spot unknown to fame to another clustered with the most precious vintage of Europe. Half-a-dozen furrows often make all the difference between vines producing a beverage which will be drunk in the halls and palaces of England and Russia, and vines yielding a harvest which will be consumed in the cabarets and estaminets of the neighbourhood. It is to be observed, however, that the first-class wines belong almost entirely to the large proprietors. Amid a labyrinth of little patches, the property of the labouring peasants around, will be a spot appertaining to, and bearing the name of, some of the famous growths; while, conversely, inserted, as if by an accident, in the centre of a district of great name,

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and producing wine of great price, will be a perverse patch, yielding the most commonplace tipple, and worth not so many sous per yard as the surrounding earth is worth crowns.

How comes this? The peasants will tell you that it does n't come at all. That it is all cant and *blague* and puff on the part of the big proprietors, and that their wine is only more thought of because they have more capital to get it bragged about. Near Chateau Lafitte, on a burning afternoon, I took refuge beneath the emblematic bush; for the emblem which good wine is said not to require, is still, in the mid and southern districts of France, in universal use; in other words, I entered a village public-house.

Two old men, very much of the general type of the people of the country—that is, tall and spare, with intelligent and mildly-expressive faces and fine black eyes, were discussing together a sober bottle. One of them had lost an arm, and the other a leg. As I glanced at this peculiarity, the one-legged man caught my eye.

"Ah!" he said, "looking at our misfortunes; I left my leg on Waterloo."

"And I," chimed in his companion, "left my arm at Trafalgar."

"*Sacré!*" said the veteran of the land. "One of the cursed English bullets took me in the knee, and spoiled as tight a lancer as they had in the gallant 10th."

"And I," rejoined the other, "was at the fourth main-deck gun of the Pluton when I was struck with the splinter while we were engaging the Mars. But

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we had our revenge. The Pluton shot the Mars' captain's head off!" — a fact which I afterwards verified. Captain Duff, the officer alluded to, was thus killed upon his quarter-deck, and the same ball shattered two seamen almost to pieces.

"*Sacré!*" said the *ci-devant* lancer, "I 'd like to have a rap at the English again—I would—the English—*nom de tonnerre*—tell me—did n't they murder the emperor?"

A rising smile, which I could not help, stopped him. I had spoken so few words, that the fact that a son of *perfide Albion* was before them was only manifested by the expression of my face.

"*Tiens!*" continued the Waterloo man, "*You* are an Englishman."

The old sailor, who was evidently by no means so keen a hand as his comrade, nudged him; a hint, I suppose, in common phrase, to draw it mild; but the ex-lancer of the 10th was not to be put down.

"Well, and if you are, what then, eh? I say I would like to have another brush with you."

"No, no! We have had enough of brushes!" said the far more pacific man of the sea. "I think—*mon voisin*—that you and I have had quite enough of fighting."

"But they killed the emperor. *Sacré nom de tous les diables*—they killed the emperor."

My modest exculpation on behalf of Great Britain and Ireland was listened to with great impatience by the maimed lancer, and great attention by the maimed sailor, who kept up a running commentary:

"*Eh! eh! entendez cela.* Now, that 's quite

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different (to his friend) from what you tell us. Come —that's another story altogether; and what I say is, that that's reasonable."

But the lancer was not to be convinced—"*Sacré bleu!*—they killed the emperor."

All this, it is to be observed, passed without the slightest feeling of personal animosity. The lancer, who, I suspect, had passed the forenoon in the cabaret, every now and then shook hands with me magnanimously, as to show that his wrath was national —not individual; and when I proposed a bottle of rather better wine than they had been drinking, neither soldier nor sailor had a word to say in objection. The wine was brought, and very good it was, though not, of course, first-class claret.

"What do you think of that?" said the sailor.

"I wish I had as good every day in England," I replied.

"And why have n't you?" said the fierce lancer. "You might, if you chose. But you drink none of our wines."

I demurred to this proposition; but the Waterloo man was down on me in no time. "Yes, yes; the wines of the great houses—the great proprietors. *Sacré!*—the *farceurs*—the *blageurs*—who puff their wines, and get them puffed, and great prices for them, when they're not better than ours—the peasant's wines—when they're grown in the same ground—ripened by the same sun! *Mille diables!* Look at that bottle!—taste it! My son-in-law grew it. My son-in-law sells it; I know all about it. You shall have that bottle for ten sous, and the Lafitte people

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and the Larose people would charge you ten francs for it; and it is as good for ten sous as theirs for ten francs. I tell you it grew side by side with their vines; but they have capital—they have power. They crack off their wines, and we—the poor people!—we, who trim and dig and work our little patches—no one knows anything about us. Our wine—bah!—what is it? It has no name—no fame! Who will give us francs? No, no; sous for the poor man—francs for the rich. Copper for the little landlord; silver—silver and gold for the big landlord! As our curé said last Sunday: 'Unto him who has much, more shall be given.' *Sacré Dieu de dieux!*—Even the Bible goes against the poor!"

All this time, the old sailor was tugging his comrade's jacket, and uttering sundry deprecatory ejaculations against such unnecessary vehemence. The Trafalgar man was clearly a take-it-easy personage; not troubled by too much thinking, and by no means a professional greivance-monger. So he interposed to bring back the topic to a more soothing subject, and said that what he would like, would be to see lots of English ships coming up the Gironde with the good cottons and woollens and hardwares we made in England, and taking back in exchange their cheap and wholesome wines—not only the great vintages *(crus)* for the great folk, but the common vintages for the common folk. "Indeed, I think," he concluded, "that sitting here drinking this good ten sous' wine with this English gentleman—who's going to pay for it—is far better than fighting him and hacking him up, or his hacking us up, with swords and balls and so forth."

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To this most sensible opinion we had all the pains in the world to get the doughty lancer to incline. He could n't see it at all. He would like to have another brush. He was n't half done for yet. It was all very well; but war was grand, and glory was grand. "*Vive la guerre!*" and "*Vive la gloire!*"

"But," said the sailor, "there is death in glory!"

"*Eh bien!*" shouted the warrior, with as perfect French sentiment as ever I heard, "*Vive la mort!*"

In the end, however, he was pleased to admit that, if we took the peasant wines, something might be made of us. The case was not utterly hopeless; and when I rose to go, he proposed a stirrup-cup—a *coup de l'étrier*—to the washing down of all unkindness; but, in the very act of swallowing it, he did n't exactly stop, but made a motion as if he would, and then slowly letting the last drop run over his lips, he put down the glass, and said, bitterly and coldly, "*Mais pourtant, vous avez tué l'Empereur!*"

I have introduced this episode principally for the purpose of showing the notions entertained by the small proprietary as to the boasted superiority of the large vineyards; but the plain truth is, that the great growers are perfectly in the right. I have stated that the quality of the soil throughout the grape country varies almost magically. Well, the good spots have been more or less known since Medoc was Medoc; and the larger and richer residents have got them, by inheritance, by marriage, and by purchase, almost entirely into their own hands. Next they greatly improved both the soil and the breed of plants. They studied and experimentalized until they found the

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most proper manures and the most promising cultures. They grafted and crossed the vine plants till they got the most admirably bearing bushes, and then, generation after generation, devoting all their attention to the quality of the wine, without regard to the quantity—scrupulously taking care that not a grape which is unripe or over-ripe finds its way to the tub—that the whole process shall be scrupulously clean, and that every stage of fermentation be assiduously attended to—the results of all this has been the perfectly-perfumed and high-class clarets, which fetch an enormous price; while the peasant proprietors, careless in cultivation, using old vine plants, anxious, at the vintage, only for quantity, and confined to the worst spots in the district, succeed in producing wines which, good as they are, have not the slightest pretence to enter into competition with the liquid harvests of their richer and more enlightened neighbours.

But it is high time to sketch, and with more elaboration than I have hitherto attempted, the claret vintage and the claret vintagers. Yet still, for a moment, I must pause upon the threshold. Will it be believed—whether it will or not it is, nevertheless, true—that the commencement of the vintage in France is settled, not by the opinion or the convenience of the proprietors, but by the *autorités* of each *arrondissement?* As September wanes and the grape ripens, the rural mayor assembles what he calls a jury of *experts;* which jury proceed, from day to day, through the vineyards, inspecting and tasting the grapes and cross-questioning the growers; after

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which, they report to the mayor a special day on which, having regard to all the vineyards, they think that the vintage ought to commence. One proprietor, in a very sunny situation and a hot soil, may have been ready to begin a fortnight before; another, in a converse locality, may not be ready to commence for a fortnight afterwards. *N'importe*—the French have a great notion of uniform symmetry and symmetrical uniformity, and so the whole district starts together—the mayor issuing, *par autorité*, a highly-official-looking document, which is duly posted by yellow-breeched *gens-d'armes*, and, before the appearance of which, not a vine-grower can gather, for wine purposes, a single grape. Now, what must be the common sense of a country which permits, for one instant, the continuance of this wretched little tyrannical humbug? Only think of a trumpery little mayor and a couple of beadles proclaiming to the farmers of England that now they might begin to cut their wheat! The mayor's mace would be forced down the beadle's throat, and the beadle's staff down the mayor's. But they manage these things—not exactly—better in France. What would France be without *les autorités?* Could the sun rise without a prefect? Certainly not. Could it set without a sub-prefect? Certainly not. Could the planets shine on France unless they were furnished with passports for the firmament? Clearly not. Could the rain rain on France unless each drop came armed with the *visé* of some wonderful bureau or other? Decidedly not. Well, then, how could the vintage begin until the people, who know nothing about the vintage, command it? It is quite clear,

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that if you have any doubt about these particulars, you know very little of the privileges, the rights, the functions, and the powers, of the "authorities" in France.

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THE VINTAGE.

CHAPTER III.

The Vintage and the Vintagers.

So much, then, for preliminary information. Let us now proceed to the joyous ingathering of the fruits of the earth—the great yearly festival and jubilee of the property and the labour of Medoc. October, the "wine month," is approaching. For weeks, every cloud in the sky has been watched—every cold night breeze felt with nervous apprehension. Upon the last bright weeks in summer, the savour and the bouquet of the wine depend. Warmed by the blaze of an unclouded sun, fanned by the mild breezes of the west, and moistened by morning and evening dews, the grapes by slow degrees attain their perfect ripeness and their culminating point of flavour. Then the vintage implements begin to be sought out, cleaned, repaired,

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and scoured and sweetened with hot brandy. Coopers work as if their lives depended upon their industry; and all the anomalous tribe of lookers-out for chance jobs in town and country pack up their bag and baggage, and from scores of miles around pour in ragged regiments into Medoc.

There have long existed pleasing, and in some sort poetical, associations connected with the task of securing for human use the fruits of the earth; and to no species of crop do these picturesque associations apply with greater force than to the ingathering of the ancient harvest of the vine. From time immemorial, the season has typified epochs of plenty and mirthful-heartedness—of good fare and of good-will. The ancient types and figures descriptive of the vintage are still literally true. The march of agricultural improvement seems never to have set foot amid the vines. As it was with the patriarchs in the East, so it is with the modern children of men. The goaded ox still bears home the high-pressed grape-tub, and the feet of the treader are still red in the purple juice which maketh glad the heart of man. The scene is at once full of beauty, and of tender and even sacred associations. The songs of the vintagers, frequently chorussed from one part of the field to the other, ring blithly into the bright summer air, pealing out above the rough jokes and hearty peals of laughter shouted hither and thither. All the green jungle is alive with the moving figures of men and women, stooping among the vines or bearing pails and basketfuls of grapes out to the grass-grown cross-roads, along which the labouring oxen drag the rough

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vintage carts, groaning and cracking as they stagger along beneath their weight of purple tubs heaped high with the tumbling masses of luscious fruit. The congregation of every age and both sexes, and the careless variety of costume, add additional features of picturesqueness to the scene. The white-haired old man labours with shaking hands to fill the basket which his black-eyed imp of a grandchild carries rejoicingly away. Quaint broad-brimmed straw and felt hats—handkerchiefs twisted like turbans over straggling elf locks—swarthy skins tanned to an olive-brown—black flashing eyes—and hands and feet stained in the abounding juices of the precious fruit—all these southern peculiarities of costume and appearance supply the vintage with its pleasant characteristics. The clatter of tongues is incessant. A fire of jokes and jeers, of saucy questions, and more saucy retorts—of what, in fact, in the humble and unpoetic but expressive vernacular, is called "chaff," —is kept up with a vigour which seldom flags, except now and then, when the butt-end of a song, or the twanging close of a chorus strikes the general fancy, and procures for the *morceau* a lusty *encore*. Meantime, the master wine-grower moves observingly from rank to rank. No neglected bunch of fruit escapes his watchful eye. No careless vintager shakes the precious berries rudely upon the soil, but he is promptly reminded of his slovenly work. Sometimes the tubs attract the careful superintendent. He turns up the clusters to ascertain that no leaves nor useless length of tendril are entombed in the juicy masses, and anon directs his steps to the pressing-trough,

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anxious to find that the lusty treaders are persevering manfully in their long-continued dance.

Thither we will follow. The wine-press, or *cuvier de pressoir*, consists, in the majority of cases, of a massive shallow tub, varying in size from four square feet to as many square yards. It is placed either upon wooden trestles or on a regularly-built platform of mason-work under the huge rafters of a substantial outhouse. Close to it stands a range of great butts, their number more or less, according to the size of the vineyard. The grapes are flung by tub and caskfuls into the cuvier. The treaders stamp diligently amid the masses, and the expressed juice pours plentifully out of a hole level with the bottom of the trough into a sieve of iron or wickerwork, which stops the passage of the skins, and from thence drains into tubs below. Suppose, at the moment of our arrival, the cuvier for a brief space empty. The treaders—big, perspiring men, in shirts and tucked-up trowsers—spattered to the eyes with splatches of purple juice, lean upon their wooden spades, and wipe their foreheads. But their respite is short. The creak of another cart-load of tubs is heard, and immediately the waggon is backed up to the broad open window, or rather hole in the wall, above the trough. A minute suffices to wrench out tub after tub, and to tilt their already half-mashed clusters splash into the reeking *pressoir*. Then to work again. Jumping with a sort of spiteful eagerness into the mountain of yielding quivering fruit, the treaders sink almost to the knees, stamping and jumping and rioting in the masses of grapes, as fountains of juice spurt about

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their feet, and rush bubbling and gurgling away. Presently, having, as it were, drawn the first sweet blood of the new cargo, the eager trampling subsides into a sort of quiet, measured dance, which the treaders continue, while, with their wooden spades, they turn the pulpy remnants of the fruit hither and thither, so as to expose the half-squeezed berries in every possible way to the muscular action of the incessantly moving feet. All this time, the juice is flowing in a continuous stream into the tubs beneath. When the jet begins to slacken, the heap is well tumbled with the wooden spades, and, as though a new force had been applied, the juice-jet immediately breaks out afresh. It takes, perhaps, half or three-quarters of an hour thoroughly to squeeze the contents of a good-sized cuvier, sufficiently manned. When at length, however, no further exertion appears to be attended with corresponding results, the tubfuls of expressed juice are carried by means of ladders to the edges of the vats, and their contents tilted in; while the men in the trough, setting-to with their spades, fling the masses of dripping grape-skins in along with the juice. The vats sufficiently full, the fermentation is allowed to commence. In the great cellars in which the juice is stored, the listener at the door—he cannot brave the carbonic acid gas to enter further—may hear, solemnly echoing in the cool shade of the great darkened hall, the bubblings and seethings of the working liquid—the inarticulate accents and indistinct rumblings which proclaim that a great metempsychosis is taking place—that a natural substance is rising higher in the eternal scale of things,

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and that the contents of these great giants of vats are becoming changed from floods of mere mawkish, sweetish fluid to noble wine—to a liquid honoured and esteemed in all ages—to a medicine exercising a strange and potent effect upon body and soul—great for good and evil. Is there not something fanciful and poetic in the notion of this change taking place mysteriously in the darkness, when all the doors are locked and barred—for the atmosphere about the vats is death—as if Nature would suffer no idle prying into her mystic operations, and as if the grand transmutation and projection from juice to wine had in it something of a secret and solemn and awful nature—fenced round, as it were, and protected from vulgar curiosity by the invisible halo of stifling gas? I saw the vats in the Chateau Margaux cellars the day after the grape-juice had been flung in. Fermentation had not as yet properly commenced, so access to the place was possible; still, however, there was a strong vinous smell loading the atmosphere, sharp and subtle in its influence on the nostrils; while, putting my ear, on the recommendation of my conductor, to the vats, I heard, deep down, perhaps eight feet down in the juice, a seething, gushing sound, as if currents and eddies were beginning to flow, in obedience to the influence of the working Spirit, and now and then a hiss and a low bubbling throb, as though of a pot about to boil. Within twenty-four hours, the cellar would be unapproachable.

Of course, it is quite foreign to my plan to enter upon anything like a detailed account of wine-making. I may only add, that the refuse-skins, stalks, and so

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forth, which settle into the bottom of the fermentation vats, are taken out again after the wine has been drawn off and subjected to a new squeezing—in a press, however, and not by the foot—the products being a small quantity of fiery, ill-flavoured wine, full of the bitter taste of the seeds and stalks of the grape, and possessing no aroma or bouquet. The Bordeaux press for this purpose is rather ingeniously constructed. It consists of a sort of a skeleton of a cask, strips of daylight shining through from top to bottom between the staves. In the centre works a strong perpendicular iron screw. The *rape,* as the refuse of the treading is called, is piled beneath it; the screw is manned capstan fashion, and the unhappy seeds, skins, and stalks, undergo a most dismal squeezing. Nor do their trials end there. The wine-makers are terrible hands for getting at the very last get-at-able drop. To this end, somewhat on the principle of rinsing an exhausted spirit bottle, so as, as it were, to catch the very flavour still clinging to the glass, they plunge the doubly-squeezed *rape* into water, let it lie there for a short time, and then attack it with the press again. The result is a horrible stuff called *piquette,* which, in a wine country, bears the same resemblance to wine as the very dirtiest, most wishy-washy, and most contemptible of swipes bears to honest porter or ale. Piquette, in fact, may be defined as the ghost of wine! —wine minus its bones, its flesh, and its soul!—a liquid shadow!—a fluid nothing!—an utter negation of all comfortable things and associations! Nevertheless, however, the peasants swill it down in astounding quantities, and apparently with sufficient satisfaction.

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And now a word as to wine-treading. The process is universal in France, with the exception of the cases of the sparkling wines of the Rhone and Champagne, the grapes for which are squeezed by mechanical means, not by the human foot. Now, very venerable and decidedly picturesque as is the process of wine-treading, it is unquestionably rather a filthy one; and the spectacle of great brown horny feet, not a whit too clean, splashing and sprawling in the bubbling juice, conveys at first sight a qualmy species of feeling, which, however, seems only to be entertained by those to whom the sight is new. I looked dreadfully askance at the operation when I first came across it; and when I was invited—by a lady, too—to taste the juice, of which she caught up a glassful, a certain uncomfortable feeling of the inward man warred terribly against politeness. But nobody around seemed to be in the least squeamish. Often and often did I see one of the heroes of the tub walk quietly over a dunghill, and then jump—barefooted, of course, as he was—into the juice; and even a vigilant proprietor, who was particularly careful that no bad grapes went into the tub, made no objection. When I asked why a press was not used, as more handy, cleaner, and more convenient, I was everywhere assured that all efforts had failed to construct a wine-press capable of performing the work with the perfection attained by the action of the human foot. No mechanical squeezing, I was informed, would so nicely express that peculiar proportion of the whole moisture of the grape which forms the highest flavoured wine. The manner in which the fruit was tossed about was pointed out to me, and

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I was asked to observe that the grapes were, as it were, squeezed in every possible fashion and from every possible side, worked and churned and mashed hither and thither by the ever-moving toes and muscles of the foot. As far as any impurity went, the argument was, that the fermentation flung, as scum to the surface, every atom of foreign matter held in suspension in the wine, and that the liquid ultimately obtained was as exquisitely pure as if human flesh had never touched it.

In the collection of these and such like particulars, I sauntered for days among the vineyards around; and, utterly unknown and unfriended as I was, I met everywhere the most cordial and pleasant receptions. I would lounge, for example, to the door of a wine-treading shed, to watch the movements of the people. Presently the proprietor, most likely attired in a broad-brimmed straw hat, a strange faded outer garment, half shooting-coat half dressing gown, would come up courteously to the stranger, and, learning that I was an English visitor to the vintage, would busy himself with the most graceful kindness, to make intelligible the *rationale* of all the operations. Often I was invited into the chateau or farm-house, as the case might be; a bottle of an old vintage produced and comfortably discussed in the coolness of the darkened, thinly-furnished room, with its old-fashioned walnut-tree escrutoires, and beauffets, its quaintly-pannelled walls, and its polished floors, gleaming like mirrors and slippery as ice. On these occasions, the conversation would often turn upon the general rejection, by England, of French wines—a sore point

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with the growers of all save the first-class vintages, and in which I had, as may be conceived, very little to say in defence either of our taste or our policy. In the evenings, which were getting chill and cold, I occasionally abandoned my room with illustrations from the *Tour de Nesle* for the general kitchen and parlour of Madame Cadillac, and, ensconcing myself in the chimney corner—a fine old-fashioned ingle, crackling and blazing with hard wood logs—listened to the chat of the people of the village; they were nearly all coopers and vine-dressers, who resorted there after the day's work was over to enjoy an exceedingly modest modicum of very thin wine. I never benefitted very much, however, by these listenings. It was my bad luck to hear recounted neither tale nor legend—to pick up, at the hands of my *compotatores*, neither local trait nor anecdote. The conversation was as small as the wine. The gossip of the place—the prospects of the vintage—elaborate comparisons of it with other vintages—births, marriages, and deaths—a minute list of scandal, more or less intelligible when conveyed in hints and allusions—were the staple topics, mixed up, however, once or twice with general denunciations of the niggardly conduct of certain neighbouring proprietors to their vintagers—giving them for breakfast nothing but coarse bread, lard, and not even piquette to wash it down with, and for dinner not much more tempting dishes.

In Medoc, there are two classes of vintagers—the fixed and the floating population; and the latter, which makes an annual inroad into the district just as the Irish harvesters do into England and Scotland,

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comprising a goodly proportion of very dubious and suspicious-looking characters. The *gen-d'armerie* have a busy time of it when these gentry are collected in numbers in the district. Poultry disappear with the most miraculous promptitude; small linen articles hung out to dry have no more chance than if Falstaff's regiment were marching by; and garden-fruit and vegetables, of course, share the results produced by a rigid application of the maxim that *la proprieté c'est le vol*. Where these people come from is a puzzle. There will be vagrants and strollers among them from all parts of France—from the Pyrenees and the Alps—from the pine-woods of the Landes and the moors of Brittany. They unite in bands of a dozen or a score men and women, appointing a chief, who bargains with the vine-proprietor for the services of the company, and keeps up some degree of order and subordination, principally by means of the unconstitutional application of a good thick stick. I frequently encountered these bands, making their way from one district to another, and better samples of "the dangerous classes" were never collected. They looked vicious and abandoned, as well as miserably poor. The women, in particular, were as brazen-faced a set of slatterns as could be conceived; and the majority of the men—tattered, strapping-looking fellows, with torn slouched hats, and tremendous cudgels—were exactly the sort of persons a nervous gentleman would have scruples about meeting at dusk in a long lane. It is when thus on the tramp that the petty pilfering and picking and stealing to which I have alluded to goes on. When actually at work,

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they have no time for picking up unconsidered trifles. Sometimes these people pass the night—all together, of course—in out-houses or barns, when the *chef* can strike a good bargain; at other times they bivouac on the lee-side of a wood or wall, in genuine gipsy fashion. You may often see their watchfires glimmering in the night; and be sure that where you do, there are twisted necks and vacant nests in many a neighbouring hen-roost. One evening I was sauntering along the beach at Paulliac—a little town on the river's bank, about a dozen of miles from the mouth of the Gironde, and holding precisely the same relation to Bordeaux as Gravesend does to London—when a band of vintagers, men, women, and children, came up. They were bound to some village on the opposite side of the Gironde, and wanted to get ferried across. A long parley accordingly ensued between the chief and a group of boatmen. The commander of the vintage forces offered four sous per head as the passage-money. The bargemen would hear of nothing under five; and after a tremendous verbal battle, the vintagers announced that they were not going to be cheated, and that if they could not cross the water, they could stay where they were. Accordingly, a bivouac was soon formed. Creeping under the lee of a row of casks, on the shingle of the bare beach, the women were placed leaning against the somewhat hard and large pillows in question; the children were nestled at their feet and in their laps; and the men formed the outermost ranks. A supply of loaves was sent for and obtained. The chief tore the bread up into huge hunks, which he distri-

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buted to his dependents; and upon this supper the whole party went coolly to sleep—more coolly, indeed, than agreeably; for a keen north wind was whistling along the sedgy banks of the river, and the red blaze of high-piled faggots was streaming from the houses across the black, cold, turbid waters. At length, however, some arrangement was come to; for, on visiting the spot a couple of hours afterwards, I found the party rather more comfortably ensconced under the ample sails of the barge which was to bear them the next morning to their destination.

The dinner-party formed every day, when the process of stripping the vines is going on, is, particularly in the cases in which the people are treated well by the proprietor, frequently a very pretty and very picturesque spectacle. It always takes place in the open air, amongst the bushes, or under some neighbouring walnut-tree. Sometimes long tables are spread upon tressles; but in general no such formality is deemed requisite. The guests fling themselves in groups upon the ground—men and women picturesquely huddled together—the former bloused and bearded personages—the latter showy, in their bright short petticoats of home-spun and dyed cloth, with glaring handkerchiefs twisted like turbans round their heads—each man and woman with a deep plate in his or her lap. Then the people of the house bustle about, distributing huge brown loaves, which are torn asunder, and the fragments chucked from hand to hand. Next a vast cauldron of soup, smoking like a volcano, is painfully lifted out from the kitchen, and dealt about in mighty ladlefuls; while the founder

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of the feast takes care that the tough, thready *bouilli* —like lumps of boiled-down hemp—shall be fairly apportioned among his guests. *Piquette* is the general beverage. A barrel is set abroach, and every species of mug, glass, cup, and jug about the establishment is called in to aid in its consumption. A short rest, devoted to chatting, or very often sleeping in the shade, over, the signal is given, and the work recommences.

"You have seen our *salle à manger*," said one of my courteous entertainers—he of the broad-brimmed straw hat; "and now you shall see our *chambre à coucher*." Accordingly, he led me to a barn close to his wine-cellars. The place was littered deep with clean, fresh straw. Here and there rolled-up blankets were laid against the wall; while all round, from nails stuck in between the bare bricks, hung by straps and strings the little bundles, knapsacks, and other baggage of the labourers. On one side, two or three swarthy young women were playfully pushing each other aside, so as to get at a morsel of cracked mirror stuck against the wall—their long hair hanging down in black elf-locks, in the preliminary stage of its arrangement.

"That is the ladies' side," said my *cicerone*, pointing to the girls; "and that"—extending his other hand—"is the gentlemen's side."

"And so they all sleep here together?"

"Every night. I find shelter and straw; any other accommodation they must procure for themselves."

"Rather unruly, I should suppose?"

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"Not a bit. They are too tired to do anything but sleep. They go off, sir, like dormice."

"*Oh, sil plait à Mossieu!*" put in one of the damsels. "The chief of the band does the police." (*Fait la gen-d'armerie.*)

"Certainly—certainly," said the proprietor; "the gentlemen lie here, with their heads to the wall; the ladies there; and the *chef de la bande* stretches himself all along between them."

"A sort of living frontier?"

"Truly; and he allows no nonsense."

"*Il est meme éxcessivement severe,*" interpolated the same young lady.

"He need be," replied her employer. "He allows no loud speaking—no joking; and as there are no candles, no light, why, they can do nothing better than go quietly to sleep, if it were only in self-defence."

One word more about the vintage. The reader will easily conceive that it is on the smaller properties, where the wine is intended, not so much for commerce as for household use, that the vintage partakes most of the festival nature. In the large and first-class vineyards the process goes on under rigid superintendence, and is as much as possible made a cold matter of business. He who wishes to see the vintages of books and poems—the laughing, joking, singing festivals amid the vines, which we are accustomed to consider the harvests of the grape—must betake him to the multitudinous patches of peasant property, in which neighbour helps neighbour to gather in the crop, and upon which whole families labour merrily together, as much for the amusement

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of the thing, and from good neighbourly feeling, as in consideration of francs and sous. Here, of course, there is no tight discipline observed, nor is there any absolute necessity for that continuous, close scrutiny

RETURNING FROM THE VINTAGE.

into the state of the grapes—all of them hard or rotten, going slap-dash into the *cuvier*—which, in the case of the more precious vintages, forms no small check upon a general state of careless jollity. Every one eats as much fruit as he pleases, and rests when he is tired. On such occasions it is that you hear to the best advantage the joyous songs and choruses of the vintage—many of these last being very pretty bits of melody, generally sung by the women and girls, in shrill treble unison, and caught up and continued from one part of the field to another.

Yet, discipline and control it as you will, the vintage will ever be beautiful, picturesque, and full

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of association. The rude wains, creaking beneath the reeking tubs—the patient faces of the yoked oxen—the half-naked, stalwart men, who toil to help the cart along the ruts and furrows of the way—the handkerchief-turbaned women, their gay, red-and-blue dresses peeping from out the greenery of the leaves—the children dashing about as if the whole thing were a frolic, and the grey-headed old men tottering cheerfully adown the lines of vines, with baskets and pails of gathered grapes to fill the yawning tubs—the whole picture is at once classic, venerable, and picturesque, not more by association than actuality.

And now, Reader, luxuriating amid the gorgeously carven and emblazoned fittings of a Palais Royal or Boulevard restorateur, Vefours, the Freres, or the Café de Paris; or perhaps ensconced in our quieter and more sober rooms—dim and dull after garish Paris, but ten times more comfortable in their ample sofas and carpets, into which you sink as into quagmires, but with more agreeable results,—snugly, Reader, ensconced in either one or the other locality, after the waiter has, in obedience to your summons, produced the *carte de vins*, and your eye wanders down the long list of tempting nectars, Spanish and Portuguese, and better, far better, German and French—have you ever wondered as you read, "St. JULLIEN, LEOVILLE, CHATEAU LA LAFITTE, CHATEAU LA ROSE, and CHATEAU MARGAUX, what these actual vineyards, the produce of which you know so well—what those actual chateaux, which christen such glorious growths, resemble? If so, listen, and I will tell you.

As you traverse the high road from Bordeaux to

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Pauillac, some one will probably point out to you a dozen tiny sugar-loaf turrets, each surmounted by a long lightning-conductor, rising from a group of noble trees. This is the chateau St. Jullien. A little on, on the right side of the way, rises, from the top of a tiny hill overlooking the Gironde, a new building, with all the old crinkum-crankum ornaments of the ancient fifteenth century country house. That is the chateau Latour. Presently you observe that the entrance to a wide expanse of vines, covering a series of hills and dales, tumbling down to the water's edge, is marked by a sort of triumphal arch or ornamented gate, adorned with a lion couchant, and a legend, setting forth that the vines behind produce the noted wine of Leoville. The chateau Lafitte rises amid stately groves of oak and walnut-trees, from amid the terraced walks of an Italian garden—its white spreading wings gleaming through the trees, and its round-roofed, slated towers rising above them. One chateau, the most noted of all, remains. Passing along a narrow, sandy road, amid a waste of scrubby-looking bushes, you pass beneath the branches of a clump of noble oaks and elms, and perceive a great white structure glimmering garishly before you. Take such a country house as you may still find in your grandmothers' samplers, decorated with a due allowance of doors and windows—clap before it a misplaced Grecian portico, whitewash the whole to a state of the most glaring and dazzling brightness, carefully close all outside shutters, painted white likewise—and you have chateau Margaux rising before you like a wan, ghastly spectre of a house, amid stately terraced

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gardens, and trimmed, clipped, and tortured trees. But, as I have already insisted, nothing, in any land of vines, must be judged by appearances. The first time I saw at a distance Johannesberg, rising from its grape-clustered domains, I thought it looked very much like a union workhouse, erected in the midst of a field of potatoes.

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LANDES SHEPHERDS.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LANDES—THE BORDEAUX AND TESTE RAILWAY—NINICHE—THE LANDSCAPE OF THE LANDES—THE PEOPLE OF THE LANDES—HOW THEY WALK ON STILTS, AND GAMBLE.

TURN to the map of France—to that portion of it which would be traversed by a straight line drawn from Bordeaux to Bayonne—and you will observe that such a line would run through a vast extent of bare-looking country—of that sort, indeed, where

> "Geographers on pathless downs
> Place elephants, for want of towns."

Roads, you will observe, are few and far between; the names of far-scattered towns will be unfamiliar to you; and, indeed, nine-tenths of this part of the map consists of white paper. The district you are

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looking at is the Landes, forming now a department by itself, and anciently constituting a portion of Gascony and Guienne. These Landes form one of the strangest and wildest parts of France. Excepting here and there small patches of poor, ill-cultivated land, the whole country is a solitary desert—black with pine-wood, or white with vast plains of drifting sand. By these two great features of the district, occasionally diversified by sweeps of green morass, intersected by canals and lanes of stagnant and often brackish water, the Landes take a goodly slice out of La Belle France. Their sea-line bounds the French side of the Bay of Biscay, stretching from Bayonne to the mouth of the Gironde; and at their point of greatest breadth they run some sixty miles back into the country; thence gradually receding away towards the sea, as though pushed back by the course of the Garonne, until, towards the mouth of the river, they fade away altogether.

So much for the *physique* of the Landes. The inhabitants are every whit as rugged, strange, and uncultivated. As the Landes were four centuries ago, in all essential points, so they are now; as the people were four centuries ago, in all essential points, so they are now. What should the tide of progress or of improvement do in these deserts of pine and sand? The people live on French soil, but cannot be called Frenchmen. They speak a language as unintelligible to a Frenchman as an Englishman; they have none of the national characteristics—little, perhaps, of the national blood. They are saturnine, gloomy, hypochondriac, dismally passing dismal lives in the depths

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of their black forests, their dreary swamps, and their far-spreading deserts of white, fine sand. Such an odd nook of the world was not to be passed unvisited; besides, I wanted to see the Biscay surf; and accordingly I left Bordeaux for the Landes—not in some miserable cross-country vehicle—not knight-errant-wise, on a Bordelais Rosinante—not pilgrim-wise, with a staff and scrip—but in a comfortable railway-carriage.

Yes, sir, a comfortable railway-carriage; and the railway in question—the Bordeaux and Teste line—is the sole enterprise of the kind undertaken and achieved in the south-west of France.

"Railways!" said the conductor of the Paris and Bordeaux diligence to me, with that magnificent condescension with which a Frenchman explains to a Briton all about *Perfide Albion!*—"Railways, monsieur," he said, "as all the world knows, have achieved the ruin of the Old England, and presently they will do as much for France. *Tenez;* they are cursed inventions—particularly the Paris and Bordeaux Railway."

But if the ruin of France is to be consummated by railways, France, like bankrupt linendrapers, will take a long time to ruin. The Bordeaux line crawls but slowly on. In 1850, we left the rails and took to the road at Tours; and, barring the bits of line leading down from some of the Mediterranean towns to Marseilles, the Bordeaux and Teste fragment was the sole morsel of railway then in operation south of Lyons. The question comes, then, to be, What earthly inducement caused the construction of this wilderness line, and how it happens that the only

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locomotives in fair Guienne whistle through the almost uninhabited Landes? The fact seems to be, that, once upon a time, the good folks of Bordeaux were taken with an inappeasable desire to have a railway. One would have thought that the natural course of such an undertaking would have been northward, through the vines and thickly-peopled country of Medoc to the comparatively-important towns of Paulliac and Lesparre. The enterprising Bordelais, however, had another scheme. Some forty miles to the west of the city, the sands, pines, and morasses of the Landes are broken by a vast shallow basin, its edges scolloped with innumerable creeks, bays, and winding friths, into which, through a breach in the coast line of sand-hills, flow the waters of the Atlantic. On the southern side of this estuary lie two or three scattered groups of hovels, inhabited by fishermen and shepherds—the most important of the hamlets being known as Teste, or Teste-la-buch. Between Teste and Bordeaux, the only line of communication was a rutty road, half sand and half morass, and the only traffic was the occasional pilgrimage to the salt water of some patient sent thither at all risks by the Bordeaux doctors, or now and then the transit towards the city of the Garonne of the products of a day's lucky fishing, borne in panniers on the backs of a string of donkeys. Folks, however, were sanguine. The speculation "came out," shares got up, knowing people sold out, simple people held on, and the line was actually constructed. No doubt it was cheaply got up. Ground could be had in the Landes almost for the asking, and from terminus to

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terminus there is not an inch of tunnel-cutting or embankment. The line, moreover, is single, and the stations are knocked up in the roughest and most primitive style. The result, however, astonished no one, save the shareholders. The traffic does not half pay the working expenses. Notwithstanding that some increase in the amount of communication certainly did take place, consequent upon the facility with which Teste can now be reached—a facility which has gone some way to render it a summer place of sea-side resort—the two trains which run *per diem* seldom convey more than a dozen or so of third-class passengers, and the shareholders at length flung themselves into the hands of the Government; and, insisting upon the advantages which would accrue to the State as soon as the Paris and Bordeaux line was finished, by a direct means of communication between the metropolis and a harbour in the Bay of Biscay, they succeeded in hypothecating their line to the Government for a small annual subvention. Such is the present agreeable position of the single railway in the south-west of France.

I was somewhat late, as I feared, for the train, and, calling a *citadine*, got the man to urge his horse to a gallop, so that we pulled up at the terminus with the animal in a lather. A porter approached, and grinned. "Monsieur has made haste, but the winter season begins to-day, and the train does not go for an hour and a half." There was no help for it, and I sauntered into the nearest *café* to read long disquisitions on what was then all the vogue in the political world—the "situation." I found the little marble

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slabs deserted—even the billiard-table abandoned, and all the guests collected round the white Fayence stove. Joining them, I perceived the attraction. On one of the velvet stools sat an old gentleman of particularly grave and reverend aspect—a most philosophic and sage-like old gentleman—and between his legs was a white poodle, standing erect with his master's cane in his paws. All the company were in raptures with Niniche, who was going through his performances.

"Niniche," said the patriarch, "what does Monsieur Tetard do when he comes home late?"

The dog immediately began to stagger about on its hind legs, sometimes losing its balance and then getting up again, looking all the time with a sort of stupid blinking stare at its master. It was clear that M. Tetard, when he came home late, did not come home sober.

"*Tiens! c'est admirable!*" shouted the spectators—burly fellows, with black beards, and honest tradesman-looking people, with glasses of *eau sucreé* in their hands.

"And now," said the old gentleman, the poodle's proprietor and instructor, "what does Madame Tetard do when Monsieur Tetard comes home late?"

The dog straightway began to utter, with wonderful volubility, a series of loud, shrill, yelping snaps, jerking itself up and down on its haunches, and flinging its paws about as if it had the hydrophobia. The spectators were enraptured. "It is actually her voice," said one. "Only the dog is too good-looking for her," said another. "*Voila petite!*" vociferated

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a third, holding a huge piece of bluish-tinted beetroot sugar to the performier, when suddenly the group was broken by a fussy, fat old gentleman with a white baggy cravat, very snuffy, and a pair of heavy gold spectacles.

"*Je dis—moi!*" shouted the new comer, in violent wrath;" *que c'est abominable ce que vous faites lá Pere Grignon.*" A murmur of suppressed laughter went through the group. Pere Grignon looked considerably taken aback, and the speaker aimed a hearty kick at Niniche, who dodged away round the stove. It was evident that he was no other than the injured and maligned Tetard himself. Instantly he broke into loud objurgations. He knew how that atrocious old *Pere Grignon* had taught his dog to malign him, the *bete miserable!* But as for it, he would poison it—shoot it—drown it; and as for Pere Grignon, who ought to have more sense, all the quartier knew what he was—an *imbecille,* who was always running about carrying tales, and making mischief. But he would appeal to the authorities; he would lay his complaint before the commisary of the quartier; he would—he would—. At this moment the excited orator caught sight of the offending poodle slipping to the door, and instantly sprung vigorously after him:—

"*Tenez-tenez;* don't touch Niniche—it's not his fault!" exclaimed the poodle's proprietor. But the dog had bolted, with Tetard in hot chase of his imitator, and vowing that he should be *écraséd* and *abiméd* as soon as caught. There was, of course, great laughter at the whole proceeding; and then the group betook themselves to the marble slabs and

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dominoes—the instructor of the offending quadruped coolly lighting his pipe, as he muttered that old Tetard was, after all, a *bon enfant,* and that over a *petit verre* he would always listen to reason.

At length the tedious hour and a half wore away, and I entered the terminus—a roughly built wooden shed. The train consisted of a first, second, and third-class carriage; but there were no first-class passengers, only one solitary second-class, and about a dozen third-classes, with whom I cast my lot. Miserable as the freight was, the locomotive whistled as loud and panted as vehemently as if it were yoked to a Great Western express; and off we went through the broad belt of nursery gardens, which encircles every French town, and where the very best examples of the working of the small proprietary system are to be seen. A rapid run through the once greatly famed and still esteemed vineyards of Hautbrion, and we found ourselves scurrying along over a negative sort of country—here a bit of heath, there a bit of vineyard—now a bald spot of sand, anon a plot of irregularly-cut stubble; while a black horizon of pine-wood rose gradually on the right and left. On flew the train, and drearier grew the landscape; the heath was bleaker—the pines began to appear in clumps—the sand-stretches grew wider—every thing green, and fertile, and *riant* disappeared. He, indeed, who enters the Landes, appears to have crossed a French frontier, and left the merry land behind. No more bright vineyards—no more rich fields of waving corn—no more clustered villages—no more chateau-tur-

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rets—no more tapering spires. You look up to heaven to see whether the sky has not changed, as well as the land. No; all there is blue and serene as before, and the keen, hot sun glares intensely down upon undulating wastes of marsh, fir, and sand, among which you may travel for leagues without seeing a man, hearing a dog bark, or a bird sing. At last we were fairly among the woods, shooting down what seemed an eternal straight tunnel, cleft by lightning through the pines. The trees stood up stark and stiff, like cast-iron; the fir is at once a solemn and a rigid tree—the Puritan of the forest; and down the side of each Puritan I noticed a straight, yellowish gash, running perpendicularly from the spread of the branches almost to the earth, and turned for explanation to an intelligent-looking man, evidently a citizen of Bordeaux, opposite me.

"Ah!" he said, "you are new to our Landes."

I admitted it.

"And these gashes down the trees—these, monsieur, give us the harvest of the Landes."

"The harvest! What harvest?"

"What harvest? Resin, to be sure."

"Ay, resin," said an old fellow with a blouse and a quick eye; "resin, monsieur; the only harvest that man can grow in sand."

"*Tenez*," said my first interlocutor; "the peasants cut that gash in the tree; and at the root they scoop a little hollow in the ground. The resin perspires out of the wood, flows slowly and glutinously down the gash, and in a month or so, according to the

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heat of the weather, the hole is full, and the man who rents the trees takes up the sticky stuff, like soup, with a ladle."

"That's a very good description," said the old bloused gentleman. "And then, sir" (addressing me), "we barrel our crop of the Landes. Yes, indeed, we barrel it, as well as they do the crop of the Medoc."

"Only you wouldn't like to drink it so well," said the Bordeaux man.

Presently we pulled up at a station—a mere shed, with a clearing around it, as there might have been in Texas or Maine. I observed the name—Tohua-Cohoa, and remarked that it did not look like a French one.

"French one!" said he of Bordeaux; "you don't expect to find French in this chaos? No, no; it is some of the gibberish the savages hereabout speak."

"No such gibberish, and no such savages either," said the little keen-eyed man. "*Moi, je suis de Landes;* and the Landes language is a far finer language than French. French! phoo, phoo!"

And he took a pinch of snuff indignantly and triumphantly. The Bordeaux gentleman winked blandly at me, as if the keen-eyed man was a character to be humoured, and then looked doubtful and unconvinced.

"Tohua-Cohoa," he said; "it has a *sacré tonnerre* of a barbarous sound; has it any meaning?"

"Meaning!" exclaimed the man of the Landes; "I should think so. Tohua-Cohoa means, in French, *Allez doucement;* and the place was so called be-

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cause there was there a dangerous swamp, in which many a donkey coming up from Teste with fish to you of Bordeaux was smothered; and so it got to be quite proverbial among the drivers of the donkeys, and they used to shout to each other, 'Tohua-Cohoa!' whenever they came near the slough; meaning to look out, and go gently, and take care of the soft places."

The man with the blouse, who was clearly the champion of the Landes, then turned indignantly from the Bordeaux man and addressed himself to me. "The language which the poor people here speak, monsieur, is a fine and expressive language, and liker the Spanish than the French. The people are poor, and very ignorant. They believe, monsieur, in ghosts, and witches, and sorceries, just as all France did two or three hundred years ago. Very few of them can read, monsieur, and they have bad food and no wine. But nevertheless, monsieur, they are *bons enfants—braves gens*, monsieur. They love their pine-woods and their sands as much as other people do their corn-fields and their vines, monsieur. They would die, monsieur, if you took them away from the sand and the trees. They are not like the Auvergnats, who go in troops to Paris to carry water from the fountains, and who are *betes—betes—bien betes!* They stay at home, monsieur. They wear their sheep-skins and walk upon their stilts, like their forefathers before them, monsieur; and if you are coming here to see the Landes, and if you lose yourself in the woods, and see a light glimmering through the trees, and rap at the cottage door, monsieur, you will be welcomed,

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monsieur, and have the best they can offer to eat, and the softest they can offer to sleep on. *Tenez, tenez; nous sommes pauvres et ignorants mais nous sommes, loyals et bons!"*

The tears fairly stood in the keen black eyes of the Landes man as he concluded his harangue, of which I have only reported the main points; for, truth to tell, the poor fellow's vehemence was so great, and his utterance so rapid, that I lost nearly as much as I caught. The Bordeaux gentleman hammered the floor with his umbrella in satirical approbation, the rest of the passengers looked curiously on, and, the engine whistling, we pulled up again at a station similar to the first—a shed—a clearing, and black pine all around. There were just three persons on the rough platform—the station-master in a blouse, and two yellow-breeched *gens-d'armes*. What could they find to occupy them among these drear pine-woods? What thief, who had not made a vow of voluntary starvation, or who had not a morbid taste for living upon resin, would ever have ventured among them? But the authorities! Catch a bit of France without an "authority!" As they certainly are omnipotent, and profess to be omniscient, it is only to be supposed that they should be omnipresent. One man left the train at the station in question—a slouching, stupid, swarthy peasant, the authorities pounced upon him, evidently in prodigious glee at catching somebody to be *autoritised* over, and we left them, spelling and squabbling over the greasy-looking "papers" presented by the profoundly respectful Jacques or Pierre.

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And now, before proceeding further, I may be allowed to describe, with some minuteness, the landscape which will greet the traveller in the Landes. Its mere surface-aspect I have already sketched; but general terms go but a small way towards indicating the dreary grandeurs of that solemn wilderness. Over all its gloom and barrenness—over all its "blasted heaths" and monotonous pine-woods, and sodden morasses, and glaring heaps of shifting sand—there is a strong and pervading sense of loneliness, a grandeur and intensity of desolation, which, as it were, clothes the land with a sad, solemn poetry peculiar to itself. Emerging from black forests of fir, the wanderer may find himself upon a plain, flat as a billiard-table, and apparently boundless as the ocean, clad in one unvaried, unbroken robe of dusky heath. Sometimes stripes and ridges, or great ragged patches of sand, glisten in the fervid sunshine; sometimes belts of scraggy young fir-trees appear rising from the horizon on the left, and fading into the horizon on the right. Occasionally a brighter shade of green, with jungles of willows and coarse water-weeds, giant rushes, and marish-mosses, and tangled masses of dank vegetation, will tell of the unfathomable swamp beneath. Dark veins of muddy water will traverse the flat oozy land, sometimes, perhaps, losing themselves in broad shallow lakes, bordered again by the endless sandbanks and stretches of shadowy pine. The dwellings which dot this dreary, yet, in its way, solemnly poetic landscape, are generally mere isolated huts, separated sometimes by many miles, often by many leagues. Round them the wanderer will descry a

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miserable field or two, planted with a stunted crop of rye, millet, or maize. The cottages are mouldering heaps of sod and unhewn and unmortared stones, clustered round with ragged sheds composed of masses of tangled bushes, pine stakes, and broad-leaved reeds, beneath which cluster, when not seeking their miserable forage in the woods, two or three cows, mere skin and bone, and a score or two of the most abject-looking sheep which ever browsed.

Proceeding through the Landes towards the coast, a long chain of lakes and water-courses, running parallel to the ocean, breaks their uniformity. The country becomes a waste of shallow pools, and of land which is parched in summer and submerged in winter. Running in devious arms and windings through moss and moor and pine, these "lakes of the dismal swamp" form labyrinths of gulfs and morasses which only the most experienced shepherds can safely thread. Here and there a village, or rather bourg, will be seen upon their banks, half hidden in the pine-woods; and a roughly-built fishing-punt or two will be observed floating like the canoe of a savage in the woodland lakes. Sometimes, as in the case of the basin of Arcachon, which will be presently described, these waters are arms of the sea; and the retreating tide leaves scores of square miles of putrid swamp. Sometimes they are mere collections of surface-drainage, accumulating without any means of escape to the ocean, and perilous in the extreme to the dwellers on their shores. For, forming the extreme line of coast, there runs, for near two hundred miles, from the Adour to the Garonne, a range of vast hills of

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white sand, as fine as though it had been sifted for an hour-glass. Every gale changes the shape of these rolling mountains. A strong wind from the land flings millions of tons of sand per hour into the sea, to be washed up again by the surf, flung on the beach, and in the first Biscay gale blown in whirlwinds inland. A winter hurricane again from the west has filled up with sand square miles of shallow lake, driving the displaced waters inland, dispersing them in gleaming lakes among the pine-woods, flooding, and frequently destroying the scattered hamlets of the people, and burying for ever their fields of millet and rye. I shall presently have occasion to touch upon some disasters of this sort. Meantime, having made the aspect of the Landes familiar to the reader, I pursue the thread of my journey.

The novelty of a population upon stilts—men, women, and children, spurning the ground, and living habitually four or five feet higher than the rest of mankind—irresistibly takes the imagination, and I leant anxiously from the carriage to catch the first glimpse of a Landean in his native style. I looked long in vain. We passed hut after hut, but they seemed deserted, except that the lean swine burrowing round the turf walls gave evidence that the pork had proprietors somewhere. At last I was gratified; as the train passed not very quickly along a jungle of bushes and coppice-wood, a black, shaggy figure rose above it, as if he were standing upon the ends of the twigs. The effect was quite eldritch. We saw him but as a vision, but the high conical

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hat with broad brims, like Mother Red-cap's, the swarthy, bearded face, and the rough, dirty sheep-skin, which hung fleecily from the shoulders of the apparition, haunted me. He was come and gone, and that was all. Presently, however, the natives began to heave in sight in sufficient profusion. There were three gigantic-looking figures stalking together across an expanse of dusky heath. I thought them men, and rather tall ones; but my companions, more accustomed to the sight, said they were boys on comparatively short stilts, herding the sheep, which were scattered like little greyish stones all over the waste. Anon, near a cottage, we saw a woman, in dark, coarse clothes, with shortish petticoats, sauntering almost four feet from the ground, and next beheld at a distance, and on the summit of a sand-ridge, relieved against the sky, three figures, each leaning back, and supported, as it seemed, not only by two daddy long-legs' limbs, but by a third, which appeared to grow out of the small of their backs. The phenomenon was promptly explained by my bloused *cicerone*, who seemed to feel especial pleasure at my interest in the matter. The third leg was a pole or staff the people carry, with a new moon-shaped crutch at the top, which, applied to the back, serves as a capital prop. With his legs spread out, and his back-stay firmly pitched, the shepherd of the Landes feels as much at home as you would in the easiest of easy chairs.

"He will remain so for hours, without stirring, and without being wearied," said my fellow-passenger. "It is a way of sitting down in the Landes. Why, a shepherd, could stand so, long enough to knit a

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pair of stockings, ay, and not have an ache in his back. Sometimes they play cards, so, without once coming off their stilts."

"Ay, and cheat! *Mon Dieu!* how they cheat!" said the Bordeaux gentleman. The native of the Landes reluctantly admitted that that was the truth, and the other went on:—

"These fellows here on the stilts are the most confounded gamblers in Europe. Men and women, it 's all the same—play, play, play; they would stake their bodies first, and their souls after. *Tenez;* I once heard of a lot of the fellows playing in a wood till they were all but starved. In the day they played by daylight, and when night came, they kindled a bonfire and played in the glare. They played on and on, in spite of hunger and thirst. They staked their money—not that they had much of that—and their crops—not that they were of great value either—and their pigs, and their sheep, and their Landes ponies, and then their furniture, and then their clothes, and, last of all, their stilts—for a Landes man thinks his stilts the principal part of his wardrobe; and, *sacré!* monsieur, three of the fellows were ruined out and out, and had to give up their hats, and sheepskins, and sabots, while the man who was the greatest winner walked home on his own stilts, with the stilts of all his comrades tucked under his arm."

"Gaming is their fault—their great fault," meekly acknowledged the blouse.

"Not at all!" said his antagonist. "Cheating is their great fault. A Landes shepherd would cheat the devil with a greasy pack of cards."

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"The fact is," replied the apologist, "that they count cheating part of the game. Their motto is, win anyhow; so it is no worse for one than the other. Cards is chance; but cheating needs skill, and *voila tout*."

We were fast approaching Teste, and had passed two or three clusters of poor huts, and a party of women up to their waists in a sluggish stream washing fleeces, while yellow patches of ripening maize began to recur quicker and quicker, showing that we had reached a comparatively thickly-peopled district, when all at once there burst upon my eyes a glorious-looking prairie of gently undulating land, of the brightest green I ever looked upon. The green of the greenest lawns of England, the green of the softest bogs of Ireland, the green even of the most intensely green patches of the Curragh of Kildare, were brown, and fuzzy, and rusty, compared to this wonderful hue. The land looked like one huge emerald, sparkling in the sun. The brightness, the freshness, the radiance of the tint, was almost supernatural, and the eye, nursed for it, as it were, after our journey over the brown moors and black pines, caught the bright fresh beauty of the colour with rapture.

"Come," I thought, "there are, at least, oases in the Landes. Never was turf so glorious; never was sward so bewitching." And then, gazing far and wide upon the prairie, I saw it dotted with human figures labouring at the soil, and great wains and carts drawn by oxen, looking like black specks upon a great, fresh, green leaf. But, in a moment, I saw something more.

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Could I believe my eyes? A ship! Yes, verily, a ship, fast aground, high and dry upon the turf! and not only one, but two, three, four, good-sized schooners and *chasse marées*, with peasants digging about them, and country carts high heaped with green rural-looking burdens.

The Landes man saw my bewilderment. "The green-looking land," he said, "is the flat bottom of part of the bay of Arcachon. It is now dead low-water, and the country people have come down with their carts to fill them with that green slimy sea-weed, which makes capital manure; and some of them, perhaps, have brought casks of resin for those ships which principally belong to Bordeaux, Rochelle, and Nantes, and come here and into other bays along the coast for the harvest of the Landes."

The engine whistled. We were at Teste—a shabby, ancient little village, with a deep stream flowing sluggishly around it, and dividing itself into a many-forked delta along the level sand; fishermen's hovels scattered on the beach, brown boats drawn up beneath them, nets drying, a considerable fishy smell pervading the atmosphere, with, beyond again, the black, unvarying mantle of pine-woods. There is a very good hotel at Teste; thanks to its being one of the Bordeaux watering-places; and there, for dinner, was provided red mullets, which would have made the red mullet-loving Duke of Devonshire crazy, as he noted the difference between the fish from the bay of Arcachon and their brethren from the coast of Weymouth.

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CHAPTER V.

THE LANDES—THE BAY OF ARCACHON AND ITS FISHERS—THE LEGEND OF CHATEL-MORANT—THE PINE-WOODS—THE RESIN-GATHERER—THE WILD HORSES—THE SURF OF THE BAY OF BISCAY—THE WITCHES OF THE LANDES—POPULAR BELIEFS, AND POPULAR CUSTOMS.

THE sun was low in the heavens next morning when I was afoot and down to the beach, the glorious bay now brimming full, and the schooners and *chasse marées*, like the swan on St. Mary's Loch, floating double, ships and shadows. The scene was very strange. The green meadow had disappeared, and where it had been, a gleaming lake stretched brilliant in the sunshine, set in the pine-woods like a mirror in an ebony frame, cutting slices of sweeping bay out of their dusky margins, and piercing their depths with silent, weedy water-veins.

Where the villages lie, there have been clearings made in the wood, precisely as one would expect to see in a New Zealand or Australian bay. Close to high-water mark, rows of rounded huts serve as store-houses for nets, and spars, and sails. Before them straggling jetties run on piles far to seaward; behind, huddled amid scanty vineyards and patches of broad-leaved Indian corn, groups of houses—their roofs nearly flat, and their walls not above six feet, in some places not four feet, high—seem cowering away from

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observation. For every cottage built of stone, there are half-a-dozen out-houses, sheds, pig-sties; and so forth, piled up with old oars, broken masts, furze, pine-cuttings, and Irish-looking sod. I made my way to what seemed the principal landing-place—a bleached jetty. A dozen or so of boats floated round it, roughly built, very narrow, and very light, lying upon the very top of the water, and just, in fact, as like canoes as the scene about resembled some still savage country. Three boats were starting for the oyster fishery, manned each by four as buxom, blithe, and debonnaire wenches as you would wish to see. They had short petticoats—your Nereides of all shores have—and straw hats, shaped like a man's. In the

stern-sheets of each boat a venerable, ancient mariner held the tiller; and as I approached, the damsels, who were getting their clumsy oars inserted between the thole-pins, clamoured out in a torrent of vociferous gabble, offering me a day's oyster-fishing, if I

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would go with them. They were evidently quite *au fait* to ridding the Bordeaux loungers of their spare francs, in the shape of passage-money, for a frolic on the oyster-banks; but I had determined to pass the day in another fashion. I wanted a sail on the bright, still bay, a walk in the pine-woods, and a glance at the surf tumbling in from the Bay of Biscay; so I scrutinized the faces of two or three lounging boatmen, with as much reference to Lavater's principles as I might, and selecting the most intelligent-looking of the lot—a mild, grey-eyed man, who spoke gently and slowly—we soon made a bargain, and were speedily afloat in the bean-cod looking canoe of which he was the skipper. I was gazing doubtfully at the heavy oars, and the expanse of water, when a flying cat's-paw made just a pretence of ruffling it.

"*Merci, le bon vent!*" said the fisherman. Up went a mast; up went a light patch of thin white canvass, and straightway the bubbles flew fast and faster by the gunwale, and there arose a sweet gurgle from the cleaving bow.

"You can see how fast we're going by the bottom," said the boatman. I leant over the gunwale, and looked down. Oh, the marvellous brightness of that shining sea! I gazed from the boat upon the sand through the water, almost as you might through the air upon the earth from a balloon. Ghost-like fish gleamed in the depths, and their shadows followed them below upon the ribbed sea-sand. Long flowing weeds, like rich green ribbons, waved and streamed in the gently running tidal current. You could see the white pebbles and shells—here a ridge of rocks,

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there a dark bed of sea-weed; and now and then a great flat-fish, for all the world like a burnished pot-lid set in motion—went gleaming along the bottom.

"Once," said the boatman, "all the bottom of this great bay that you are looking at was dry land, and there were cottages upon it, and an ancient chateau. That was the chateau of Armand de Chatelmorant, an old baron of these parts, a wicked man and a great magician, who had a familiar spirit, which came when he blew a horn, and who was able, by his sorceries, to rule the winds that blow. Only, once he raised a storm he could not quell; and it was that storm which made the Bay of Arcachon; for the wind blew the sand of the sea-shore up the country, like a snow-storm, and the sand-hills rolled before it; and what the wind began, the *coup de mer* finished, and the ocean came bursting through the breach it had battered in the sand-ridges of the coast, and swallowed up the chateau and drowned the magician, and there was an end of him."

"Well," said I, "so be it; he deserved his fate."

"For many a year after the flood the baron had made," the boatman continued, "you could see, out of a boat, the pointed tops of the towers of the chateau below you, with the weather-cocks still pointing to the west, and the green sea-weed hanging to them, like pennons from a ship's vanes."

"But I fear it is not to be seen now."

"Oh! no. Ages and ages ago it rotted and rotted away; but the old men of the village have heard from their fathers that the fishermen only ventured there

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in calm summer weather and in good day-light; for, in the dark, look you, and when a Biscay wind was blowing, they said they heard the sounding of Chatel-morant's magic horn, and they saw his imp flying above them and wailing like a hurt sea-bird."

Of course, I was on thorns to hear all the story; and so my boatman recounted a rude, disjointed tale, which I have hitched, legendwise, into the following narrative:—

The Baron Armand de Chatel-morant sat in his dim studio high up in the most seaward tower of the chateau of Chatel-morant. His hair and his beard were white, but his eyes were keen, and his cheeks as ruddy as the eyes and the cheeks of a young man. He had a furnace beside him, with implements of projection, crucibles, and powders. On the table were astrological instruments, and the magic crystal, which his Familiar had given him, and in which—only, however, when the Familiar pleased—the baron could read the future; but, for every reading of the future, the baron was a year older—the Familiar had a year of his life. The baron was clothed in a long furred robe, and he wore red shoes, with peaked toes, as long again as his feet. His face was moody, and clouds went driving along his brow. He took up his instruments, and laid them down, and opened a big book, full of spells and cantrips, and shut it; then he walked about the room; and then he stopped and blew a silver whistle.

Very prompt at the sound came an old man—reverent and sorrowful looking—with a white wand;

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for he was the seneschal of the chateau of Chatelmorant.

"Your niece," said the baron, "who comes hither from the town of Bordeaux to visit you, and whom I saw but yester even,—has she returned?"

"She went this morning, monseigneur," said the seneschal; "she has preparations to make; for, God save the pretty child! she is to be married on the day of Blessed St. John."

The baron frowned; for he was not an admirer of the saints, being quite, indeed, on the other side of the hedge.

"Say the number of the day, and the name of the month," he replied, angrily; "and do not torment me with that shaveling jargon which they talk in the monastery of Andrew, whom they call St. Andrew at Bordeaux."

The seneschal, who was accustomed to be bullied, particularly upon religious subjects, crossed himself behind his back; for he was a prudent man, and, owing to the absence of mind of the baron, who was always experimentalizing in the black art, managed, one way or other, to pick up so much as to make his place a tolerably profitable one.

"Married!" said the baron; "and to whom?"

"Just to honest and brave Jacques Fort—the stoutest mariner who sails out of the Garonne. He has got a ship of his own, now—the *Sainte Vierge;* and to-day he sails upon his first voyage, as far as Bayonne."

"He sails to-day—so; and the maiden's name—your niece's name—what is that?"

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"Toinette, so please you, sir."

"You may go."

And go the seneschal did, wondering very much at the uncommon interest his master seemed to be taking in vulgar, sublunary things.

Then Baron Armand de Chatel-morant paced the room a long time in gloomy meditation. At length he sat down again, and said aloud: "There is no doubt of it—I am in love. That face haunts me; Toinette's face is ever floating opposite to me. 'T is an odd feeling; I was never so before. But, since it is so, I must even have the maiden—she will cheer me—I love her face. I will send to-morrow to Bordeaux, as from her uncle; and when she comes here, by the star of Aldeboran, she stays here, Jacques Fort to the contrary notwithstanding!"

"Wrong—quite wrong!" said a voice.

The baron turned coolly round, and saw, sitting upon the arm of the chair close to him, the figure of a very thin dwarf, with a long, unearthly face, and fingers like hawks' claws. This was the imp—the baron's Familiar.

"How, Klosso!" said Armand; "you come without being called?"

"Yes; but you would have called me soon."

"You know what I am thinking of—of Toinette. I love her—I must have her."

"You will not have her."

"Why so?"

"Because it is so decreed."

"Klosso," said the baron, "I don't believe you.

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You know the future ; but you lie about it when you speak."

"Will you, then," answered the demon, "look into the crystal: that can t' lie. Come—it 's only another year—give yourself a treat—come !"

"I have given you many years already," said the baron, musing; "look how grey my hair is !"

"Dye it," said the imp, who, if he was a Familiar, certainly behaved as such. But the baron took no notice of his impertinence. He was dreadfully smitten by Toinette, and said he 'd have a twelvemonths' worth of knowledge of futurity for her sake. The thin dwarf grinned, and then made a motion of relief, as one who saw before him the speedy end of a long, long watch. So he took the crystal, uttered, as may be supposed, some magic words; and the baron looked upon the clear surface.

"Malediction !" he exclaimed, as he saw in the crystal a huge hearth, with pots on the fire, and poultry roasting before it, and Toinette tending the cookery, and a stalwart fellow helping her clumsily.

"That is Toinette !" cried the baron; "but who is the rascal with her ?"

"Her husband, Jacques Fort."

"Curses on him !"

Here the baron saw Jacques fling his arm round Toinette's waist, and kiss her so naturally, that he ground his teeth.

"Domestic felicity," said the imp; "a charming picture, baron—they 're cooking the christening feast for young Jacques."

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The baron flung the crystal down.

"Pay me," said the imp; and he passed the bird-like hand over the baron's face, and each of his fingers drew a wrinkle. A shudder went over the sorcerer's frame, and then he breathed heavily, and looked wistfully at the imp. He was a year older.

"Klosso!" shouted Armand, leaping to his feet, "I will fight fate!"

"Better not," said Klosso.

"Curse the future!" exclaimed the baron; "I will alter the future, and give the lie to the crystal, as to you!"

"If you try," replied the imp, coolly, "you will belong to me before the morning."

"Silence, slave!" cried Armand, who was not a man to be put out of his way; "you rule the winds—I rule you. Make the west wind blow."

The imp raised its hand, and they heard the whistling of a strong, gusty wind, and the creaking of the weather-cocks, as they all turned towards the sea.

"Stronger—stronger—stronger!" shouted the baron; and the whistle became a roar, and the roar a howl; and the castle shook and swayed in the blast.

"Good—good!" laughed the baron; "something more than a puff there—ha! ha!—as Jacques Fort has found by this time on the deck of his new ship in the Bay of Biscay."

The Familiar gently remarked that the weather was roughish, when the seneschal rushed into the room in a dreadful state of terror at the storm.

"My lord—my lord!" he said, "we shall all be

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blown away; the air is full of sand; you would be suffocated outside. The wind is tearing up the pines; and oh, poor Jacques Fort is at sea, and drowned—drowned, by this time, to a certainty!"

"Yes," said Armand, "I should rather think so. Toinette must take up with somebody else.—Stronger!"

The last injunction was addressed to the imp, and instantly complied with. The tempest roared like the up-bursting of a volcano, and screeched and screamed through the sugar-loaf turrets and the lattices, which it had burst in, and the loop-holes, like a hundred thousand devils' whistles. The seneschal fell on his knees.

"Stronger still!" said the baron.

And meantime what was Jaqües Fort doing in his new ship? With every rag of canvass torn out of the bolt-ropes, the *Sainte Vierge* was flying on the very top, as it seemed, of the driving spray, on to the breakers. Jacques was the only man left on deck—every one of the rest had been washed overboard, and were already sleeping in the sea; and he knew that in a moment he would follow them. The staggering ship rose on the back of a mighty breaker; and the captain knew that with its fall upon the beach his vessel would be ground to powder.

"Oh, Toinette!" he murmured, as the ship was hove forward like a bolt from a bow, and then fell shooting into a creaming current of rushing water, while the sand-hills appeared right and left for a moment, and then were left astern. The last grand wave had burst the barrier, and the frail ship and the

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kneeling mariner were borne onward on the ridge of the advancing flood, which formed the lake of Arcachon. Jacques Fort saw a light, and steered towards it: it was the light in the baron's chamber at the chateau of Chatel-morant.

There, by the burst-in lattice, stood the baron, his grey hair flying above his head, and ever shouting to the imp, "Stronger, Klosso—stronger!" And every time he used the words, the hurricane burst louder and louder upon the rocking turrets. And still Armand clung to the stone-work of the burst-in lattice, through which the flying sand drove in, and clustered in his robes and hair.

And now the terrified domestics began to rush up to the chamber of the baron.

"My lord, such a storm was never heard of!"

"My lord, the devil is loose, and riding on the wind!"

"My lord, the end of the world is at hand!"

"Klosso!" shouted the baron, "stronger!"

As he spoke, the wind burst like a thunder-clap over them, and they heard the crash of a falling tower. The serving men and women grovelled in terror on the floor; the baron clung by the window; the imp, visible only to him, sat on the back of the arm-chair, as he had sat since his appearance.

But hush! Another sound, mingling with the roar of the wind, and deeper and more awful still. It rapidly increased, and the baron found his face besprinkled with driving drops of water—they were salt.

"My lord—my lord!" screamed the seneschal,

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sinking, as he spoke, at the baron's knees; "my lord—the sea!"

A cry was heard without; the lights of the hamlet beneath disappeared; and then a shock from below made the chateau swing and rock, and white waves were all around them.

"The sea, my lord," said the seneschal, "has burst the sand-banks; the castle stands on low ground. We are all dead men—the sea—the sea!"

The Baron Armand turned to Klosso: "Does he speak truth?"

"The worthy gentleman," said the imp, "is perfectly in the right; you are all dead men; and, Monseigneur le Baron, when you gave me last a year of your life, you gave me the last you had to give."

Up rose the water, and higher dashed the waves. Up, foot by foot, and yard by yard; and still the baron stood erect amid the raving of the elements—his face as white as his hair, but his eyes as bright and keen as ever.

"Klosso," he said, "I am yours; and the future is the future."

He looked at the iron lamp swinging above his head.

"It will soon be out," said Klosso.

Jacques Fort still steered to the light. It came nearer and nearer; and he saw, even through the gloom and the driving spray, that it shone from a castle-turret, and he seized the tiller to change the course of the vessel; but as he did so, the grand, triumphant, finishing blast of the hurricane fell upon the seething flood like iron—heaved up one bristling,

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foaming sea, which caught the *Sainte Vierge* upon its crest, and flung the ship almost into the air. The light gleamed for a moment almost beneath him; and Jacques, rushing to the bow, saw below it, as in a prison, a fierce convulsed face, and staring eyes, and flying white hair; and the eyes saw him. As Jacques recognised the sorcerer Armand of Chatel-morant, so did Armand recognise the face and form he had seen helping Toinette to cook the christening feast.

The next instant the *Sainte Vierge* was borne over and over the highest turret of the chateau, her keel a fathom good above the loftiest and the gaudiest of all the gilt weather-cocks.

The event foreshadowed in the crystal duly took place on the anniversary of the day which saw the chateau de Chatel-morant swallowed in the Bay of Arcachon.

The legend of the submerged chateau, with which I plead guilty to having taken a few liberties, but "only with a view" (as the magistrate said when he put his neighbour into the stocks)—"only with a view towards improvement," occupied us during the greater part of our smooth and pleasant sail. Dismissing matters legendary, we talked of the fishermen of the bay, and their neighbours, the shepherds on stilts. The man of the sea held the men of the land cheap. The peasants were never out of the forests and the sand, he said; the fishermen often went to Bordeaux, and sometimes to Rochelle, and sometimes even to Nantes. They (the boatmen) never used stilts; but as soon as the peasant's children were able to toddle, they were clapped upon a pair of sticks, and many a

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tumble, and many a broken face they caught, before they could use them easily. "They are a good set of people, but very ignorant, and they believe whatever you tell them. They are frightened out of their wits if you speak of witches or sorcerers; but we know that all these old tales are nothing but nonsense. We go to Bordeaux very often as pilots, and to Rochelle, and even to Nantes." I was further informed, that in the winter time the fishermen pursued their occupation in the bay in such boats as that in which I was sailing; and that in summer they went out into the Atlantic; but never ventured more than a few miles to sea, and never, if they could help it, stayed out a night.

This kind of conversation brought us tolerably well to the narrow passage, all fenced with intricate sand-banks, which leads to the open sea. A white, graceful lighthouse rose above the sand-banks on our right, into which the pine-woods were stretching in long, finger-like projections; and the boat, beginning to rise and fall upon the slow, majestic heave which the swell without communicated to the shallow water within the bar, assured me that if we went further, the surf would prevent our landing at all. We ran the boat upon the beach, and drawing her up high and dry, plunged into, not the greenwood, but the black-wood tree. It was hard walking. The pines grew out of fine bright sand, bound here and there together by carpets of long bent grass, and the air was sickly with the peculiar resinous smell of the rich sap of the tree fermenting and distilling down the gashes. In our ramble, we encountered two of

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the peasants, whose dreary work it is to hack the pines and ladle up the flowing proceeds. We heard the blows of the axe echoing in the hot silence of the mid-day, and made our way to whence the sound proceeded, speedily descrying the workman, perched upon a slight bending ladder, gashing the tree. This man, and, indeed, all his brethren whom I saw, were miserable-looking creatures—their features sunken and animal-like—their hair matted in masses over their brows—their feet bare, and their clothing painfully wretched. Their calling is as laborious as it is monotonous. Starting with the dawn, they plunge—a ladder in one hand, and an adze in the other—into the recesses of the pine-wood, repeating the same process to every tree. The ladder in question is very peculiar, consisting of a single strip of elastic wood, about ten feet long, dotted with knobs cut plain upon one side for the foot to rest upon, and thus serving instead of rounds or steps. This primitive ladder is sliced away towards the top, so as to rest more commodiously upon the tree. When in use, it is placed almost perpendicularly, and the workman ascends it like a monkey, never touching the tree, but keeping the ladder in its position by the action of his legs, which, from the knee downward, seem to cling round and round the bending wood, and keep it in its place, even when the top, laid perhaps against the rounded side of the trunk, appears to be slipping off every moment.

"Well," said my guide, the Teste boatman, "I would rather reef topsails in a gale of wind than go up there, at any rate."

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The ladder, its proprietor told me, could not be used except with naked feet. The instrument with which he cut the tree was as sharp as a razor, and required long practice to acquire the knack of using it. I wondered that the gashing did not kill the trees, as some of the largest were marked with half-a-dozen cuts from the ground to the fork. Here and there, indeed, you found one which had succumbed to the process, rotted, and fallen; but the majority seemed in very good case, nevertheless.

"Look at that tree," said a resin-gatherer. More than half the bark had certainly gone in these perpendicular stripes, and yet it looked strong and stately "That tree is more than a hundred years old; and that is not a bad age for either a man or a fir."

Leaving the peasant behind, we pushed steadily towards the sea. The ground, thanks to the debris of the pines, was as slippery as ice, except where we plunged into fine hot sand, half way to the knees. Every now and then we crossed what I cannot describe better than by calling it a perfectly bald spot in the woods—a circular patch of pure white sand—in certain lights, you might have taken it for snow. All around were the black pines; but not a blade or a twig broke the drifted fineness of the bald white patch. You could find neither stone nor shell—nothing but subtle, powdery sand—every particle as minute and as uniform as those in an hour-glass.

"That," said my guide, when we came in view of the first of these singular little saharas—"that is a devil's garden."

"And what does he grow there?" I asked. The

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man lowered his voice: "It is in these spots of fine white sand that all the sorcerers and witches, and warlocks in France—ay, and I have heard, in the whole world—meet to sing, and dance, and frolic; and the devil sits in the middle. So, at least," he added, after a pause, and in a more sprightly tone—"so the peasants say."

"And do you say it?"

"Well, I do not know. There's witches, for certain, in the Landes,—old women—but whether they come flying out here to dance round the devil or no—the peasants say so for certain—but I don't think I believe it."

"I should hope you did n't."

"They enchant people, though; there's no doubt of that. They can give you the fever so bad that no doctor can set you to rights again; and they can curse a place, and keep the grass from growing on it; but I don't believe they fly on broomsticks, or dance round the devil."

"Are there any young women witches?"

"Well, I do hear of one or two. *Mais elles ne sont pas bien fortes.* It is only the old ones make good witches, and the uglier they are the better."

"Well, now, did they ever do any harm to you?"

The man paused, and looked at me with a puzzled expression. "Our little Marie," he said, "has fits; and my wife does say—" Here he stopped. "No, monsieur," he said, "I do not believe in witches."

But he did, as firmly as King Jamie; only now and then, in the bright sunlight, and with an incredulous person, he thought he did not.

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On, however, we went mile after mile, over the slippery ground, and in the shadow of the pines, ere we saw gleaming ahead, the region of fine sand, and heard—although the little breeze which blew was off the shore—the low thunder of the "coup de mer"—the breaking surf of the ocean. Presently, passing through a zone of stunted furze, and dry thin-bladed grass, we emerged into the most fearful desert I ever looked upon—a sea of heights and hollows, dells and ridges, long slopes and precipitous ravines—all of them composed of pure white, hot, drifting sand. The labour of walking was excessive. I longed for the stilts I had seen the day before. Every puff of breeze sent the sand, like dry pungent powder, into our faces, and sometimes we could see it reft from the peaks of the ridges, and blown like clouds of dust far out into the air. All at once my guide touched my arm, "*Voila! donc, voila! des chevaux sauvages!*" It certainly only required a breed of wild horses to make the country an exact counterpart of Arabia; and I eagerly turned to see the steeds of the desert, just succeeding in catching a glimpse of a ruck of lean, brown, shaggy ponies, disappearing round a hill, in a whirlwind of sand. There is, undoubtedly, something romantic and Mazeppaish in the notion of wild horses of the desert; but stern truth compels me to add, that a more stunted, ragged lot of worthless brutes, not bigger than donkeys, than were the troop of desert steeds of the Landes which I had the fortune to see, could be nowhere met with. My fisherman told me that, when caught and tamed, they were useful in carrying sacks and panniers along the sandy ways;

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but that there were not more vicious, stubborn brutes in nature than Landes ponies.

A doubly fatiguing trudge, unbroken by any further episodical visions of desert steeds, but enlivened by the fast increasing thunder of the surf, at length brought us to its foam. Winding through a succession of sand valleys, we climbed a steepish bank, sinking to our knees at every step, and from this last ridge beheld a long, gentle slope, as perfectly smooth as though the sand had been smoothed by a ruler—fining away down to the white creaming sheets of water which swept, with the loud peculiar hiss of the agitated sea, far up and down the level banks. The full force of the great heaving swells was expended in breakers, roaring half a mile from the land; and from their uttermost verge to the tangled heaps of seaweed washed high and dry upon the beach, was a vast belt of foaming water, extending away on either hand in a perfectly straight line as far as the eye could reach, and dividing the shipless expanse of water from the houseless expanse of land. The scene was very solemn. There was not even a sea-bird overhead—not an insect crawling or humming along the ungrateful sand. Only the grand organ of the surf made its incessant music, and the sharp thin rustle of the moving sand came fitfully upon the ear. I sat down and listened to it, and as I sat, the continually shifting sand gradually rose around me, as the waters rose round the chateau of Chatelmorant. Had I stayed there long enough, only my head would have been visible, like the head of the sphinx.

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I dined that day at the hotel, *tete-à-tete* with a young priest, who was returning to Bordeaux from a visit to his brother, one of the officers of the Preventitive Service, whose lonely barracks are almost the only human habitations which break the weary wilderness stretching from the Adour to the Gironde. One would have thought that there could be but little smuggling on such a coast; but the Duaniers are always *autorités*, and the waves of the Gulf of Gascony could not, of course, break on French ground without *autorités* to help them. With respect to the priest, however, he had one of the finest heads and the most perfectly chiselled features I ever saw. The pale high brow—the keen bright eyes, with remarkably long eye-lashes—the tenuity of the cartilage of the nose, and the perfect delicacy of the mouth—all told of intellect in no common development; while the meek sweetness of the noble face had something in it perfectly heavenly. Fling in imagination an aureole round that head, and you had the head of a youthful martyr, or a saint canonized for early virtues. There was devotion and aspiration in every line of the countenance—a meek, mild gentleness, beautifully in keeping with every word he uttered, and every movement he made. I was the more struck with all this, inasmuch as there is not an uglier, meaner, nor, I will add, dirtier, set of worthy folks in all the world, than the priests of France. Nine times out of ten, they are big-jowled, coarse, animal-looking men, with mottled faces, and skins which do not take kindly to the razor. The arrangements about the neck show a decided scarcity of

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linen, and a still greater lack of soap and water. They are seldom or never gentlemen, their figures are ungainly, their motions uncouth, and—barring, of course, their scholastic and theological knowledge—I found the majority with whom I conversed stupid, illiterate, and unintelligent. Now, the young priest at Teste was the reverse of all this. With manners as polished as those of any courtly *abbé* of the courtly old *regime,* there was a perfect atmosphere of frankness and quiet good-humour about my companion, and his conversation was delightfully easy, animated, and graceful. I do not know if my friend belonged to the College of Jesus; but, if he did, he was cut out for the performance of its highest and subtlest diplomacy.

We talked of the strange part of the world I was visiting, and I found he knew the people and the country well. I mentioned the submerged chateau and its legend, and he replied that it was an undoubted fact, that both chateaux and villages had been overwhelmed—both by the inbursting of the sea, and by great gales blowing vast hills of sand down into the existing lakes, and so forcing them out of their ancient beds. The sand, indeed, he said, was more dangerous than the water. Often and often the coast-guard stations had to be dug out after a gale; and he believed that, on one occasion, a small church near the mouth of the Gironde had been over whelmed to such a height that only a few feet of the spire and the weathercock were left apparent. The story put me forcibly in mind of the remarkably heavy fall of snow experienced by my old friend,

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Baron Munchausen; but, for all that, I see no reason why it should not be literally correct. The pines, the priest informed me, were the saving of the country, by fixing the unstable soil, and the Government had engineers busily engaged in laying out plantations all along the coast — the object being to get the trees down to high-water mark. I mentioned the superstitions of the people.

"Alas!" said the priest, "What you have heard is perfectly true. We are improving a little, perhaps. The boys and girls we get to come to school are taught to laugh at the notion of their old grandmothers being witches, and in another generation or two there will be a great change."

"And how do your witches work?" I asked. "As ours in England used to do — by spell and charm?"

"Precisely. They are said to make clay figures of their victims, and to stick pins in them, or bake them in a fire; and then they have rhymes and cabalistical incantations, and are greatly skilled in the magic power of herbs. The worst of it is, that a year seldom passes without an outrage on some poor old woman. A lout, who thinks himself bewitched by such a person, will attack her and beat her; and occasionally a bullet has been fired at night through the cottage-window."

"The Landes people have, or had, other queer notions, as well as the witch ones?"

"Oh, yes! They long held out against potatoes, which, they said, gave them apoplexy, and they have only lately begun to milk their cows."

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"Why so? As a pastoral people, they ought to be great in butter and cheese."

"On the contrary, they dislike them, and use lard or goose-grease instead. Indeed, for centuries and centuries, they religiously believed that Landes cows gave no milk."

"But was not the experiment ever tried?"

"Scores of times. An anxious reformer would go to a Landes farmer, and urge him to milk his cows. 'Landes cows give no milk,' would be the answer. 'Will you let me try?' would, perhaps, be replied. The Landes man would have no objection; and the cow would be brought and milked before him."

"Well, seeing that would convince him."

"Ah, you don't know the Landes people—not in the least; why, the farmer would say, 'Ay, there are a few drops, perhaps; but it's not worth the trouble of taking. Our fathers never milked their cows, and they were as wise as we are. And next day he would have relapsed into the old creed, that Landes cows never gave milk at all."

I inquired about the rate at which the stilt-walkers progressed—whether they could, as one sometimes hears, keep up with a horse at the gallop; and found, as I expected, that six or seven miles an hour was as much as they ever managed to achieve. The priest went on succinctly to sketch the costume and life of the people. When in regular herding dress, the shepherd of the Landes appears one uncouth mass of dirty wool. On his body he wears a fleece, cut in the fashion of a rude paletot, and sometimes flung over one shoulder, like a hussar's jacket. His thighs

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and legs are defended on the outside by cuisses and greaves of the same material. On his feet he wears sabots and coarse worsted socks, covering only the heels and the instep. His remaining clothing generally consists of frayed and tattered homespun cloth; and altogether the appearance of the man savours very strongly of that of a fantastically costumed scarecrow.

So attired, then, with a gourd containing some wretched *piquette* hung across his shoulders, and provided with a store of rye-bread, baked, perhaps, three weeks before, a few dry sardines, and as many onions or cloves of garlic, the Landes shepherd sallies forth into the wilderness. He reckons himself a rich man, if his employer allows him, over and above his food, sixty francs a-year. From the rising to the setting of the sun, he never touches the ground, shuffling backwards and forwards on his stilts, or leaning against a pine, plying the never-pausing knitting-needle. Sometimes he drives his flock home at even-tide; sometimes he bivouacs in the wild. Unbuckling his stilts, and producing his flint and steel, he has soon a rousing fire of fir-branches, when, gathering his sheep-skins round him, he makes himself comfortable for the night, his only annoyances being the mosquittoes and the dread of the cantrips of some unchancy old lady, who may peradventure catch a glimpse of him in the moonlight, as she rides buxomly on her besom to a festal dance in a devil's garden.

"Yet still," continued the young priest, "they are a good, honest-hearted, open-handed people. For

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their wild, solitary life they have a passionate love. The Landes peasant, taken from his dreary plains, and put down in the richest landscape of France, would pine for his heath, and sand, and woods, like a Swiss for his hills. But they seldom leave their home here in the forests. They live and die in the district where they were born, ignorant and careless of all that happens beyond their own lonely bounds. France may vibrate with revolution and change— the shepherds of the Landes feel no shock, take no heed, but pursue the daily life of their ancestors, perfectly happy and contented in their ignorance, driving their sheep, or notching their trees in the wilderness."

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CHAPTER VI.

UP THE GARONNE—THE OLD WARS ON ITS BANKS—ITS BOATS AND ITS SCENERY—AGEN—JASMIN, THE LAST OF THE TROUBADOURS—SOUTHERN COOKERY AND GARLIC—THE BLACK PRINCE IN A NEW LIGHT—A DREARY PILGRIMAGE TO PAU.

A SOLEMN imprecation is on record, uttered against the memory of the man who invented getting up by candle-light; to which some honest gentleman, fond of long lying, has appended a fellow curse, fulminated against the man who invented getting up at all. Whatever we may think of the latter commination, I suppose we shall all agree in the propriety of the former. At all events, no one ever execrated with more sincere good will the memory of the ingenious originator of candle-light turnings-out than I did, when a red ray shone through the keyhole of my bedroom, and the knuckles of—one would call him boots at home—rattled at the door, while his hoarse voice proclaimed, "*Trois heures et demi*,"—a most unseasonable and absurd hour certainly; but the Agen steamer, having the strong stream of the Garonne to face, makes the day as long as possible; and starts from the bridge—and a splendid bridge it is—of Bordeaux, crack at half-past four. There was no help for it; and so, leaving my parting compliments for my worthy host, I soon found myself following the truck which conveyed my small baggage, modestly

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stuck into the interstices of an Alp-like pile of ricketty boxes and faded valises, the property of an ancient *commis voyageur*, my fellow-lodger; and pacing, for the last time, the stately quays of the city of the Black Prince.

Early as it was, and pitch-dark, the steam-boat pier was crowded and bustling enough. Men with lanterns and luggage were rushing breathlessly about —and gentlemen with brushy black beards were kissing each other with true French *éffusion*—while a crowd of humble vintagers were being stowed away in the fore part of the boat. On the pier I observed a tent, and looking in, found myself in a genuine early breakfast shop, where I was soon accommodated with a seat by a pan of glowing charcoal. The morning was bitter cold; and a magnificent bowl of smoking coffee, bread hot from the oven, and just a nip of cognac, at the kind suggestion of the jolly motherly-looking old lady in no end of shawls, who presided over the establishment, and who pronounced it "*Bon pour l'estomac, du monsieur le voyageur.*" Then aboard; and after the due amount of squabbling, bell-ringing, and contradictory orders, we launched forth upon the black, rushing river.

A dreary time it is waiting for the daylight of an autumnal morning, watching the pale negative lighting of the east—then the spreading of the dim approaching day—stars going out, and the outlines of hills coming in—and houses and trees, faint and comfortless, looming amid the grey, cold mist. The Garonne gradually turned from black to yellow—the genuine pea-souppy hue—and bit by bit the whole

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landscape came clearly into stark-staring view—but still cold and dreary-looking—until the cheering fire stood upon the hill-tops, and announced the rising sun. In half an hour the valley of the Garonne was a blaze of warmth and cheerfulness, and nothing could be more picturesquely beautiful, seen under such auspices, than the fleet of market-boats through which we threaded our way, and which were floating quietly down to Bordeaux. I dismiss the mere vegetable crafts; but the fruit-boats would have made Mr. Lance leap and sing for joy. They were piled—clustered—heaped over—with mountains of grapes bigger than big gooseberries—peaches and apricots, like thousands of ladies' cheeks—plums like pulpy, juicy cannon-balls—and melons big as the head of Gog or Magog. I could not understand how the superincumbent fruit did not crush that below; but I suppose there is a knack in piling. At all events, the boats were loaded to the gunwales with the luscious, shiny, downy, gushing-looking globules, purple and yellow, and both colours mellowed and softened by the grateful green of the clustering leaves. These boats looked like floating cornucopias. Amongst them sometimes appeared a wine-boat—one man at the head, one at the stern, and a Pyrenees of wine casks between them—while here and there we would pass a huge Noah's ark of a barge, towed by a string of labouring oxen, and steered from a platform amidships by a tiller a great deal longer, thicker, and heavier than the mast.

And now for a bit of the landscape. We have Gascony to our right, and Guienne to our left.

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Here and there, then, particularly in Guienne, the Garonne is not unlike the tamer portions of the Rhine. The green vine-clothed banks rise into precipitous ridges, whitened by streaks of limestone cliff, cottages nestling in the crevices and ravines, and an occasional feudal tower crowning the topmost peak. The villages passed near the water's edge are doleful-looking places, ruinous and death-like; whitish, crumbling houses, with outside shutters invariably closed; empty and lonesome streets, and dilapidated piers, the stakes worn and washed away by the constant action of the river. Take Langon and Castres as specimens of these places: two drearier towns—more like sepulchres than towns—never nurtured owls and bats. They seem to be still lamenting the old English rule, and longing for the jolly times when stout English barons led the Gascon knights and men-at-arms on profitable forays into Limousin and Angoumais. Occasionally, however, we have a more promising and pleasing looking town. These, for the most part, are tolerably high up the river, and possess some curious and characteristic features. You will descry them, for instance, towering up from a mass of perpendicular cliffs; the open-galleried and bartizaned red houses, reared upon arches and pillars, rising from the rock; flights of stairs from the water's edge disappearing among the buildings, and strips of terraced gardens laid out on the narrow shelves and ledges of the precipice.

The ruins of old feudal castles are numerous on both sides of the river; and if the red mossy stone could speak, many a tale of desperate siege and assault

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it could, no doubt, tell—for these strongholds were perpetually changing masters in the wars between the French and the English and Gascons; and often, when peace subsisted between the crowns, were they attacked and harried by moss-trooping expeditions led by French Watts Fire-the-Braes, or by English Christies of the Clinthill. While, then, the steamer is slowly plodding her way up stream, turning reach after reach, and showing us another and yet another pile of feudal ruins, let us sit down here with Froissart beneath the awning, and try to gain some inkling into the warlike customs of the times when these thick-walled towers—no doubt built, as honest King James remarked, by gentlemen who were thieves in their hearts—alternately displayed the Lion Rampant and the Fleur-de-Lis.

In all the fighting of the period—I refer generally to the age of the Black Prince—there would appear to have been a great deal of chivalric courtesy and forbearance shown on either side. It was but seldom that a place was defended *à outrance.* If the besiegers appeared in very formidable force, the besieged usually submitted with a very good grace, marched honourably out, and had their turn next time. I cannot find that there was anything in the nature of personal animosity between the combatants, but there was great wantonness of life; and though few men were killed in downright cold blood, a man was frequently made the victim of a sort of murderous frolicsomeness, the manner of his death being suggested by the circumstances of the moment. For instance, on one occasion, an English and Gascon garrison was be-

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sieged in Auberoche—the French having "brought from Toulouse four large machines, which cast stones into the fortress night and day, which stones demolished all the roofs of the towers, so that none within the walls dared to venture out of the vaulted rooms on the ground-floor." In this strait, a "varlet" undertook to carry letters, requesting succour, to the Earl of Derby, at Bordeaux. He was unsuccessful in getting through the French lines, and being arrested, the letters were found upon him, hung round his neck, and the poor wretch bound hand and foot, inserted in one of the stone-throwing machines. His cries for mercy all unheeded, the engine made two or three of its terrific swings, and then launched the screaming "varlet" into the air, right over the battlements of Auberoche, "so that he fell quite dead amid the other varlets, who were much terrified at it;" and presently, the French knights, riding up to the walls, shouted to the defenders: "Gentlemen, inquire of your messenger where he found the Earl of Derby, seeing that he has returned to you so speedily." But the Earl of Derby did come, and took signal vengeance. The battle, which Froissart tells in his best manner, resulted in the capture by the English of nine French viscounts, and "so many barons, squires, and knights, that there was not a man-at-arms among the English that had not for his share two or three."

The captains of the pillaging bands, who preyed both upon the English and the French, and the hired auxiliaries, who transferred their services from one side to the other, were, however, miserable assassins,

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thirsting for blood. These men were frequently Bretons; and, says Froissart, "the most cruel of all Bretons was Geoffrey Tete-Noire." With this Geoffrey Tete-Noire, continues the old chronicler, "there was a certain captain, who performed many excellent deeds of arms, namely, Aimerigot Marcel, a Limousin squire, attached to the side of the English." One of the "deeds of arms" performed under this worthy's auspices is narrated as follows :—

"Aimerigot made one day an excursion, with only twelve companions, to seek adventures. They took the road towards Aloise, near St. Fleur, which has a handsome castle in the bishopric of Clermont. They knew the castle was only guarded by the porter. As they were riding silently towards Aloise, Aimerigot spied the porter sitting upon the branch of a tree without side of the castle. The Breton, who shot extraordinary well with a cross-bow, says to him, 'Would you like to have that porter killed at a shot?'—'Yea,' replied Aimerigot; "and I hope you will do so.' The cross-bow man shoots a bolt, which he drives into the porter's head, and knocks him down. The porter, feeling himself mortally wounded, regains the gate, which he attempts to shut, but cannot, and falls down dead."

This delectable anecdote, Froissart—probably as kind-hearted a man by nature as any of his age—tells as the merest matter of course, and without a word of compunction or reproof. The fact is, that the gay and lettered canon of Chimay cared and thought no more of the spilling of blood which was not gentle, than he would of the scotching of a rat

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or a snake. Lingeringly and wofully does he record the deaths of dukes, and viscounts, and even simple knights and squires, who have done their *devoirs* gallantly; but as to the life-blood of the varlets—the vilains—the kernes—the villagios—the Jacques Bonhommes—foh! the red puddle—let it flow; blood is only blood when it gushes from the veins of a gentleman!

The evening was closing, and the mist stealing over the Garonne, when we came alongside the pier at Agen. A troop of diligence *conducteurs* and canal touters immediately leaped on board, to secure the passengers for Toulouse, either by road or water. Being, fortunately, not of the number who were thus taken prisoners, I walked up through the sultry evening—for we are now getting into the true south—to the very comfortable hotel looking upon the principal square of the town. One of my objects in stopping at Agen was, to pay a literary visit to a very remarkable man—JASMIN, the peasant-poet of Provence and Languedoc—the "Last of the Troubadours," as, with more truth than is generally to be found in *ad captandum* designations, he terms himself, and is termed by the wide circle of his admirers; for Jasmin's songs and rural epics are written in the *patois* of the people, and that *patois* is the still almost unaltered *Langue d'Oc*—the tongue of the chivalric minstrelsy of yore. But Jasmin is a Troubadour in another sense than that of merely availing himself of the tongue of the *ménestrels*. He publishes, certainly—conforming so far to the usages of our degenerate modern times; but his great triumphs

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JASMIN.

are his popular recitations of his poems. Standing bravely up before an expectant assembly of perhaps a couple of thousand persons—the hot-blooded and quick-brained children of the South—the modern Troubadour plunges over head and ears into his lays, working both himself and his applauding audience into fits of enthusiasm and excitement, which, whatever may be the excellence of the poetry, an Englishman finds it difficult to conceive or account for. The raptures of the New Yorkers and Bostonians with Jenny Lind are weak and cold compared with the ovations which Jasmin has received. At a recitation given shortly before my visit at Auch, the ladies present actually tore the flowers and feathers out of their bonnets, wove them into extempore garlands, and flung them in showers upon the panting minstrel; while the editors of the local papers next morning assured him, in floods of flattering epigrams,

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that, humble as he was now, future ages would acknowledge the "divinity" of a Jasmin! There is a feature, however, about these recitations, which is still more extraordinary than the uncontrollable fits of popular enthusiasm which they produce. His last entertainment before I saw him was given in one of the Pyrenean cities (I forget which), and produced 2000 francs. Every sous of this went to the public charities; Jasmin will not accept a stiver of money so earned. With a species of perhaps overstrained, but certainly exalted, chivalric feeling, he declines to appear before an audience to exhibit for money the gifts with which nature has endowed him. After, perhaps, a brilliant tour through the South of France, delighting vast audiences in every city, and flinging many thousands of francs into every poor-box which he passes, the poet contentedly returns to his humble occupation, and to the little shop where he earns his daily bread by his daily toil, as a barber and hairdresser. It will be generally admitted, that the man capable of self-denial of so truly heroic a nature as this, is no ordinary poetaster. One would be puzzled to find a similar instance of perfect and absolute disinterestedness in the roll of minstrels, from Homer downwards; and, to tell the truth, there does seem a spice of Quixotism mingling with and tinging the pure fervour of the enthusiast. Certain it is, that the Troubadours of yore, upon whose model Jasmin professes to found his poetry, were by no means so scrupulous. "Largesse" was a very prominent word in their vocabulary; and it really seems difficult to assign any satisfactory reason for a man refusing to

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live upon the exercise of the finer gifts of his intellect, and throwing himself for his bread upon the daily performance of mere mechanical drudgery.

Jasmin, as may be imagined, is well known in Agen. I was speedily directed to his abode, near the open *Place* of the town, and within earshot of the rush of the Garonne; and in a few moments I found myself pausing before the lintel of the modest

A POET'S HOUSE.

shop inscribed, *Jasmin, Perruquier, Coiffeur de jeunes Gens.* A little brass basin dangled above the threshold; and, looking through the glass, I saw the master of the establishment shaving a fat-faced neighbour. Now, I had come to see and pay my compliments to a poet; and there did appear to me to be something strangely awkward and irresistibly ludicrous in having to address, to some extent in a literary and com-

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plimentary vein, an individual actually engaged in so excessively prosaic and unelevated a species of performance. I retreated, uncertain what to do, and waited outside until the shop was clear.

Three words explained the nature of my visit; and Jasmin received me with a species of warm courtesy, which was very peculiar and very charming—dashing at once, with the most clattering volubility and fiery speed of tongue, into a sort of rhapsodical discourse upon poetry in general, and his own in particular—upon the French language in general, and the *patois* of it spoken in Languedoc, Provence, and Gascony in particular. Jasmin is a well-built and strongly limbed man, of about fifty, with a large, massive head, and a broad pile of forehead, overhanging two piercingly bright black eyes, and features which would be heavy were they allowed a moment's repose from the continual play of the facial muscles, which were continually sending a series of varying expressions across the swarthy visage. Two sentences of his conversation were quite sufficient to stamp his individuality. The first thing which struck me was the utter absence of all the mock-modesty, and the pretended self-underrating, conventionally assumed by persons expecting to be complimented upon their sayings or doings. Jasmin seemed thoroughly to despise all such flimsy hypocrisy. "God only made four Frenchmen poets!" he burst out with; "and their names are Corneille, Lafontaine, Beranger, and Jasmin!" Talking with the most impassioned vehemence, and the most redundant energy of gesture, he went on to declaim against the influences of civil-

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ization upon language and manners as being fatal to all real poetry. If the true inspiration yet existed upon earth, it burned in the hearts and brains of men far removed from cities, *salons*, and the clash and din of social influences. Your only true poets were the unlettered peasants, who poured forth their hearts in song, not because they wished to make poetry, but because they were joyous and true. Colleges, academies, schools of learning, schools of literature, and all such institutions, Jasmin denounced as the curse and the bane of true poetry. They had spoiled, he said, the very French language. You could no more write poetry in French now, than you could in arithmetical figures. The language had been licked, and kneaded, and tricked out, and plumed, and dandified, and scented, and minced, and ruled square, and chipped—(I am trying to give an idea of the strange flood of epithets he used)—and pranked out, and polished, and muscadined, until, for all honest purposes of true high poetry, it was mere unavailable and contemptible jargon. It might do for cheating *agents de change* on the Bourse—for squabbling politicians in the Chambers—for mincing dandies in the *salons*—for the sarcasm of Scribeish comedies, or the coarse drolleries of Palais Royal farces; but for poetry the French language was extinct. All modern poets who used it were mere *faiseurs de phrase*—thinking about words, and not feelings. "No, no," my Troubadour continued; "to write poetry, you must get the language of a rural people—a language talked among fields, and trees, and by rivers and mountains

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—a language never minced or disfigured by academies, and dictionary-makers, and journalists; you must have a language like that which your own Burns (whom I read of in Chateaubriand) used; or like the brave old mellow tongue—unchanged for centuries—stuffed with the strangest, quaintest, richest, raciest idioms, and odd, solemn words, full of shifting meanings and associations, at once pathetic and familiar, homely and graceful—the language which I write in, and which has never yet been defiled by calculating men of science or jack-a-dandy *litterateurs*."

The above sentences may be taken as a specimen of the ideas with which Jasmin seemed to be actually overflowing at every pore in his body, so rapid, vehement, and loud was his enunciation of them. Warming more and more as he went on, he began to sketch the outlines of his favourite pieces, every now and then plunging into recitation, jumping from French to *patois*, and from *patois* to French, and sometimes spluttering them out, mixed up pell-mell together. Hardly pausing to take breath, he rushed about the shop as he discoursed, lugging out, from old chests and drawers, piles of old newspapers and reviews, pointing me out a passage here in which the estimate of the writer pleased him, a passage there which showed how perfectly the critic had mistaken the scope of his poetic philosophy, and exclaiming, with the most perfect *naivete*, how mortifying it was for men of original and profound genius to be misconceived and misrepresented by pigmy whipper-snapper scamps of journalists. There was one review of his works,

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published in a London "*Recueil*," as he called it, to which Jasmin referred with great pleasure. A portion of it had been translated, he said, in the preface to a French edition of his works; and he had most of the highly complimentary phrases by heart. The English critic, he said, wrote in the *Tintinum;* and he looked dubiously at me when I confessed that I had never heard of the organ in question. "*Pourtant*," he said, "*je vous le ferai voir*:" and I soon perceived that Jasmin's *Tintinum* was no other than the *Athenæum*.

In the little back drawing-room behind the shop, to which the poet speedily introduced me, his sister, a meek, smiling woman, whose eyes never left her brother, following him as he moved with a beautiful expression of love and pride in his glory, received me with simple cordiality. The walls were covered with testimonials, presentations, and trophies, awarded by cities and distinguished persons, literary and political, to the modern Troubadour. Not a few of these are of a nature to make any man most legitimately proud. Jasmin possesses gold and silver vases, laurel branches, snuff-boxes, medals of honour, and a whole museum of similar gifts, inscribed with such characteristic and laconic legends as—"*Au Poete, Les Jeunes filles de Toulouse reconnair antes* ——." The number of garlands of *immortelles*, wreaths of ivy-jasmin (punning upon the name), laurel, and so forth, utterly astonished me. Jasmin preserved a perfect shrubbery of such tokens; and each symbol had, of course, its pleasant associative remembrance. One was given by the ladies of such a town; another was the gift of

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the prefect's wife of such a department. A handsome full-length portrait had been presented to the poet by the municipal authorities of Agen; and a letter from M. Lamartine, framed, above the chimney-piece, avowed the writer's belief that the Troubadour of the Garonne was the Homer of the modern world. M. Jasmin wears the ribbon of the Legion of Honour, and has several valuable presents which were made to him by the late ex-king and different members of the Orleans family.

I have been somewhat minute in giving an account of my interview with M. Jasmin, because he is really the popular poet—the peasant poet of the south of France—the Burns of Limousin, Provence, and Languedoc. His songs are in the mouths of all who sing in the fields and by the cottage firesides. Their subjects are always rural, *naive,* and full of rustic pathos and rustic drollery. To use his words to me, he sings what the hearts of the people say, and he can no more help it than can the birds in the trees. Translations into French of his main poems have appeared; and compositions more full of natural and thoroughly unsophisticated pathos and humour it would be difficult to find. Jasmin writes from a teeming brain and a beaming heart; and there is a warmth and a glow, and a strong, happy, triumphant march of song about his poems, which carry you away in the perusal as they carried away the author in the writing. I speak of course from the French translations, and I can well conceive that they give but a comparatively faint transcript of the pith and power of the original. The *patois* in which these

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poems are written is the common peasant language of the south-west. It varies in some slight degree in different districts, but not more than the broad Scotch of Forfarshire differs from that of Ayrshire. As for the dialect itself, it seems in the main to be a species of cross between old French and Spanish—holding, however, I am assured, rather to the latter tongue than the former, and constituting a bold, copious, and vigorous speech, very rich in its colouring, full of quaint words and expressive phrases, and especially strong in all that relates to the language of the passions and affections.

I hardly know how long my interview with Jasmin might have lasted, for he seemed by no means likely to tire of talking, and his talk was too good and too curious not to be listened to with interest; but the sister, who had left us for a moment, coming back with the intelligence that there was quite a gathering of customers in the shop, I hastily took my leave, the poet squeezing my hand like a vice, and immediately thereafter dashing into all that appertains to curling-irons, scissors, razors, and lather, with just as much apparent energy and enthusiasm as he flung into his rhapsodical discourse on poetry and language.

Hereabouts you begin to become sensible of a change in the cookery at the *table-d'hôtes;* and in the gradually increasing predominance of oil and garlic, you recognise the kitchen influences of the sweet south. Garlic is a word of fear—of absolute horror to a great proportion of our countrymen, whose prejudices will permit them to learn no better. I admit

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that the first whiff of the odorous root coming upon inexperienced nostrils is far from pleasant; indeed, I well remember being once driven from the table in a small *gasthoff* at Strasbourg by the fumes of a particularly strong sausage. Now, however, I think I should know better. A relish for garlic, in fact, is one of those many acquired tastes which grew upon us with curious rapidity. You turn from the first garlicky dish with dismay; the second does not appear quite so bad; you muster up courage, and taste the third. A strange flavour certainly—nasty, too—but still—not irredeemably bad—there *is* a lurking merit in the sensation—and you try the experiment again and again—speedily coming to Sir Walter Scott's evident opinions touching the *petit point d'ail*, "which Gascons love and Scotsmen do not despise." Indeed, your friends will probably think it well if you content yourself with the *petit point*, and do not give yourself up to a height of seasoning such as that which I saw in the *salle à manger* at Agen, drive two English ladies headlong from the room. Every body in the South eats garlic, and you will find it for your interest, if but in self-defence, to do the same; while the oil eating is equally infectious: you enter Provence, able just to stand a sprinkling upon your salad—you depart from it, thinking nothing of devouring a dish of cabbage, chopped up, and swimming in the viscous fluid. The peasants all through the South eat and drink oil like so many Russians. Wandering through the dark and narrow streets of Agen—for we have now reached the point where the eaves of the roofs are made to project so far as to cast a perpetual shade

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upon the thoroughfare beneath—I came upon a group of tiny urchins, clustered round a grocer's shop, in great admiration of a row of clear oil-flasks displayed in the window.

"*Tiens*," said one. "*C'est de l'huile ça—de l'huile claire—ça doit etre bon su' le pain—ça!*" The little gourmand looked upon oil just as an English urchin would upon treacle.

It was from the heights above Agen—studded with the plum-trees which produce the famous *prunes d'Agen*—that I caught my first glimpse of the Pyrenees. I was sitting watching the calm uprising of the light smoke from the leaf-covered town beneath, and marking the grand panorama around me—the masses of luxuriant vines climbing up the plum and fig-trees, and the earth frequently yellow with the bursting beds of huge melons and pumpkins—when, extending my gaze over the vast expanse of champagne country, watered by the winding reaches of the Garonne, I saw—shadowy as the phantoms of airy clouds, rising into the far bright air—faintly, very faintly traced, but still visible, a blue vision of sierrated and jagged mountain peaks, stretching along the horizon from east to west, forming the central portion of the great chain of peaks running from Perpignan to Bayonne, and certainly, at least, one hundred and twenty miles distant from me as the crow flies. There they stood, —Louis Quatorze to the contrary, notwithstanding— one of the great landmarks of the world; a natural boundary for ever; dividing a people from a people, a tongue from a tongue, and a power from a power!

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Below me, at the back of the town, once rose the ancient castle of Agen. Its ruins were demolished, with those of a cathedral, at the time of the Revolution; but its memory recalls a very curious story, developing the true character of the Black Prince, and shewing that, chivalrous and daring as he was, his tongue had in it an occasional smack of the braggart, and that the Foremost Knight of all the World could occasionally do uncommonly sneaking things. Thus it fell out:—In the year 1368, the Lord of Aquitaine announced that he would raise a hearth-tax throughout Guienne. The measure was, of course, unpopular, and the Gascon lords appealed to the King of France, as Feudal Superior of the Prince; and the King sent, by two commissioners—a lawyer and a knight—a summons to Edward, to appear and answer before the Parliament of Paris. The emissaries were introduced in High Court, at Bordeaux, told their tale, and exhibited their missives. The Black Prince heard in silence, and then, after a long pause, he sternly and solemnly replied: "Willing shall we be to attend on the appointed day at Paris, since the King of France sends for us; but it will be with the helmet on our head, and sixty thousand men behind us."

The envoys fell on their knees, and bowed their heads to the ground. After the Prince had retired, they were assured that they would get no better answer; and so, after dinner, they set forth on the road to Toulouse, where the Duke of Anjou lay, to convey to him the defiance of the Englishman. Meantime, however, Edward began rather to repent

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the unconditional style of his reply, and to wish the ambassadors back again. Perhaps, after all, he had been a little too hasty, and had gone a little too far; so he called together the chief of his barons, and opened his mind to them. "He did not wish," he said, "the envoys to bear his cartel to the King of France." In the opinion of the straightforward practitioners whom he consulted, the means of prevention were easy: what more practicable and natural than to send out a handful of men-at-arms—catch the knight and the lawyer, and then and there cut their throats? But Edward refused to commit unnecessary slaughter; and possibly exclaiming, as gentlemen in a drama and a dilemma always do—"I have it"—he gave some private instructions to Sir William le Moine, the High Steward of Agenois, who immediately set forth at the head of a plump of spears. Meantime, the envoys were quietly jogging along, when, what was their horror and surprise at being suddenly pounced upon by the Lord Steward, and arrested, upon the charge of having stolen a horse from their last baiting place. It was in vain that the unfortunate pair offered to bring any evidence of the falsity of the charge; Sir William had as many witnesses as he commanded men-at-arms, and the victims were hurried to the castle of Agen, and left to their own reflections in the securest of its dungeons. When they got out again, or whether they ever got out at all, Froissart does not condescend to inform us; but surely the story shews the Black Prince in a new and not exactly favourable light. We would hardly have expected to find the "Lion whelp of England"

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stooping to trump up a false accusation against innocent men, in order to shuffle out of the consequences of his own brag.

I found it no easy matter to get comfortably from Agen to Pau: cross-country diligences are most untrustworthy conveyances. The pace at which they crawl puts it out of the question that they should ever see a snail which they did not meet; while the terribly long stages to which the horses are doomed, keeps one in a constant state of moral discomfort. However, I managed to get rattled and jangled on to Auch, on the great Toulouse road, one of those towns which you wonder has been built where it chances to lie, rather than anywhere else; and boasting a grand old Gothic cathedral church, which Louis Quatorze, in the kindest manner, enriched with a hugely clumsy Grecian portico, supported on fat, dropsical pillars. The question was now, how to get on to Pau. The Toulouse diligence passed every day, but was nearly always full; I might have to wait a week for a place. A *voiturier*, however, was to start in the evening, and he faithfully promised to set me down at Tarbes, whence locomotion to Pau is easy, in time for a late supper; and so with this worthy I struck a bargain. He shewed me a fair looking vehicle, and we were to start at six. Punctually to the time, I was upon the ground, but no conveyance appeared. The place was the front of a carrier's shed, with an army of *roulage* carts drawn up before it. I kicked my heels there in vain, for not a bit could I see of *voiture* or *voiturier*. Seven struck—half-past seven—the

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north-wind was bitterly cold, and a sleety rain began to fall. Had I absolute powers for ten minutes, like Abou Hassan, sorrowful would have been the fate of that *voiturier*. As it was, the wind got colder and colder; the streets became deserted, and the rain and sleet lashed the rough pavement with a loud, shrieking rattle, when a wilder gust than common came thundering up the narrow street. At length, sick of cursing the scoundrel, I turned, for warmth, into a vast, broad-eaved *auberge*, the house of call, I supposed, for the carriers; and entering the great shadowy kitchen, almost as big and massive looking a room as an old baronial hall, a voice I knew—the voice of the rascally *voiturier* himself—struck my ear, exclaiming with the most warm-hearted affability, "*Entrez, monsieur; entrez.* We were waiting for you."

Waiting for me! Surrounded by a group of men in blouses, and two or three fat women, who were to be my fellow-passengers, there was the villain, discussing a capital dinner—the bare-armed wenches of the place rushing between the vast fire-place and the table, with no end of the savouriest and the most garlicky of dishes, and the whole party in the highest state of feather and enjoyment. The cool impertinence of the greeting, however, tickled me amazingly; and room being immediately made, I was entreated to join the company, and exhorted to eat, as it would be a good many hours before I had another chance. This looked ominous; and besides, the whole meal, full of nicely browned stews, was so appetising, that I fear I committed the enormity of making a very

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tolerable second dinner; and so about half-past eight we at last got under weigh.

But not in the vehicle which I had been shown. There was some cock-and-bull story of that having been damaged; and we were squeezed—six of us, including the fat ladies—into a dreadful square box, with our twelve legs jammed together like the sticks of a faggot, in the centre. Oh, the woes of that dreary night!—the gruntings and the groanings of the fat ladies—the squabbles about "making legs," and, notwithstanding our crowded condition, the intensity of the pinching cold—one window was broken, another would n't pull up, and the whole vehicle was full of cracks and crevices. Outside, the gale had increased to a hurricane; the rain and sleet lashed the ground, so that you could hardly hear the driver shouting at the full pitch of his voice to the poor jades, who drearily dragged us through the mire. After an hour or two's riding, the water began to trickle in on all sides. The fat ladies said they could not possibly survive the night; and a poor thin slip of a soldier next me accepted half a railway wrapper with the most vehement "*Merci-bien merci!*" I ever heard in my life. About one in the morning we pulled up at a lone public-house, in the kitchen of which the passengers refreshed themselves with coffee, and I myself, to their great surprise, with a liberal application of cognac and hot water. But the French have no notion of the mellow beauties of toddy. The rest of the night wore slowly and wretchedly on. I believe we had the same horses all the way. Day was grey around us when we heard the voices of the

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market people flocking in to Tarbes; and looking forth, after a short, nightmareish dose, I beheld around me a wide champaign country, as white with snow as Nova Zembla at Christmas. And this was the boasted South of France, and the date was the twentieth of October!

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CASTLE OF PAU.

CHAPTER VII.

PAU—THE ENGLISH IN PAU—ENGLISH AND RUSSIANS—THE VIEW OF THE PYRENEES—THE CASTLE—THE STATUE OF HENRI QUATRE—HIS BIRTH—A VISION OF HIS LIFE—ROCHELLE—ST. BARTHOLEMEW—IVRY—HENRI AND SULLY—HENRI AND GABRIELLE—HENRI AND HENRIETTE D'ENTRAGUES—RAVAILLAC.

EXCEPTING, perhaps, the famous city of Boulogne-sur-Mer, Pau is the most Anglicised town in France. There are a good many of our countrymen congregated under the old steeples of Tours which every British man should love, were it only for Quentin Durward; but they do not leaven the mass; while in Pau, particularly during the winter time, the main street and the *Place Royale* look, so far as the passengers go, like slices cut out out from Weymouth, Bath, or Cheltenham. You see in an instant the insular cut

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of the groups, who go laughing and talking the familiar vernacular along the rough *pavé*. There is a tall, muscular hoble-de-hoy, with red hair, high shirt collar, and a lady on each arm—fresh-looking damsels, with flounces, which smack unmistakeably of England. It is a young gentleman with his sisters. Next come a couple of wonderfully well-shaved, well buttoned-up, fat, elderly, half-pay English officers, talking "by Jove, sir," of "Wilkins of ours;" and "by George, sir," of what the "old Duke had said to Galpins of the 9th. at the United Service." An old fat half-pay officer is always a major. I do not know how it happens, but so it is; and when you meet them settled abroad, ten to one they have been dragged there by their wives and daughters.

"By Jove, sir!" said one of these veterans to me at Pau—he was very confidential over a glass of brandy and water at the *café* on the *Place*—"By Jove, sir, for myself, I 'd never like to go further from Pall Mall than just down Whitehall, to set my watch by the Horse Guards' clock; but the women, you know, sir, have a confounded hankering for these confounded foreign places; and, by Jove, sir, what is an old fellow who wants a quiet life to do, sir?"

The colony of our country folks at Pau keep, as usual, very much together, and try to live in the most English fashion they may; ask each other mutually to cut mutton; display joints instead of *plats*, and import their own sherry; pass half their time studying *Galignani*, and reading to each other long epistles of news and chat from England—the majors and other old boys clustering together

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like corks in a tub of water; the young people getting up all manner of merry pic-nics and dances, and any body who at all wishes to be in the set, going decorously to the weekly English service.

"*Tenez,*" said a Pau shopkeeper to me; "your countrymen enjoy here all the luxuries of England. They have even an episcopal chapel and a pack of fox-hounds."

Of course, the prosperity of Pau mainly depends upon its English residents, who are generally well-to-do people, spending their money freely. Shortly before my visit, however, a Russian prince, who had established himself in a neighbouring chateau, had quite thrown the English reputation for wealth into the shade. His equipages, his parties, the countess's diamonds, had overblazed the grandeur of the English all put together; and the way in which he spent money enraptured the good folks of the old capital of Bearne. The Russians, indeed, wherever they go on the continent, deprive us of our *prestige* as the richest people in the world—an achievement for which they deserve the thanks of all Englishmen with heads longer than their purses.

"*Ah, monsieur!*" I was once told, "*la pluie de guineés, c'est bonne; mais le pluie de roubles, c'est une averse—un deluge!*"

Gaston Phœbus, Count de Foix, was a sad Bluebeard of a fellow, but he showed his taste in pitching upon a site for the castle of Pau. He reared its towers on the edge of a rocky hill. Far beneath sparkle the happy waters of the Gave—appearing and disappearing in the broken country—a tumbling

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maze of wooded hill, green meadow, straggling coppice, corn-fields, vineyards, and gardens—verily a land flowing with milk and honey. Further on, sluggish round-backed hills heave up their green masses, clustered all over with box-wood; and then come—cutting with many a pointed peak and jagged sierra—the bright blue sky—the glorious screen of the Pyrenees. From the end of the *Place*, which runs to the ridge of the bank on which stands the town, you may gaze at it for hours—the hills towering in peak and pinnacle, sharp, ridgy, saw-like—either deeply, beautifully blue, or clad in one unvarying garb of white; and beyond that, Spain. The same view from the castle is even still finer, as you are more elevated; and the sheer sink of the wall and rock below you, makes, as it were, a vast gulf, across which the mind leaps, even over the green stumbling landscape of the foreground to the blue or white peaks beyond.

But the feature—the characteristic—the essence—the very soul of Pau—is neither the fair landscape, nor the rushing Gave, nor the stedfast Pyrenees. It is the memory of the good King Henri Quatre, which envelopes castle and town—which makes haunted holy stones of these grim grey towers—which gives all its renown and glory to the little capital of Bearne. Look up at the "Good King" in his bronze effigy in the *Place*. These features are more familiar to you than those of any foreign potentate. You know them of old—you know them by heart—a goodly, honest, well-favoured, burly face—a face with mind and matter in it—a face not of an abstract transcendental hero, but emphatically of a MAN. Passion and impulse are there, as in

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STATUE OF HENRI QUATRE.

the jaw of Henry VIII.; energy and strong thought, as in the brow of Cromwell; a calm, and courtly, and meditative smile over all, as in the face of Charles I. The stubbly beard grizzling round the firm and close-set lips, and worn by the helmet, speaks the soldier—the conqueror of Ivry; the high, broad forehead and the quick eye tell of the statesman—he who proclaimed the edict of Nantes; the frank, gallant, and blithsome expression of the whole face—what does it tell of—of the gallant, whose mingled sagacity and debonnair courage won La Reine Margot from the in-

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trigues of Catherine; whose impulsive heart and fiery passions cast him at the feet of Gabrielle d'Estrees; and whose weakness—manly while unmanly—made him for a time the slave of Henriette d'Entragues. There is an encyclopædia of meaning in the face, and even in the figure, of Henri. He had a grand mind, with turbulent passions; he was deeply wise, yet frantically reckless; he had many faults, but few vices. If he gave up a religion for a throne, he never claimed to be a martyr or a saint. Indeed, he was the last man in the world deliberately to run his head against a wall. He thought that he could do more for the Huguenots by turning Catholic and King, than by remaining Protestant and Pretender; and he did it. Yet for all—for the men of Rome and the men of Geneva—he had a broad, genial, hearty sympathy. Were they not all French?—all the children of a king of France? Henri had not one morsel of bigotry in his soul: his mind was too clear, and his heart too big. And yet, with the pithiest sagacity—with the sternest will—with the most exalted powers of calm comprehension—and the most honest wish to make his good people happy—he could be recklessly vehement — Quixotically generous — he could fling himself over to his passions—do foolish things, rash things—insult the kingdom for which he laboured, and which he loved—and thunder out his wrath at the grey head of the venerable counsellor who stood by him in field and hall, and whose practical wisdom it was which trimmed and shaped Henri's grand visions of majestic politics and astounding plans for national combinations. In the face,

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then, and in the figure of the Good King, you can trace, I think, some such mixture of qualities. Neither are beau ideals. You are not looking at an angel or an Apollo—but a bold, passionate, burly, good-humoured man, big in the bone, and firm in muscle, with plenty of human flesh and its frailties, yet with plenty of mind to shine through, and elevate them all.

Let us enter the castle of his birth. Thanks to Louis Philippe, it has been rescued from the rats and the owls, and re-fitted as exactly as possible in its ancient style. Mounting the grand staircase, we see everywhere around, on walls and vaulted ceiling, the gilt cyphers, "H. M."—not, however, meaning Henri and Margot, but the grandfather of the King of France—the stern, old Henri D'Albret, King of Navarre, and Margaret his wife—*La Marguerite des Marguerites*, the Pearl of Pearls. Pass through a series of noble state-apartments, vaulted, oak-pannelled, with rich wooden carved work adorning cornice and ceiling, and we stand in the room in which Henri saw the light. Jeanne D'Albret's bed, a huge structure, massive and carven, and with ponderous silken curtains, still stands as it did at the birth of the king. And what a strange coming into the world that was. The Princess of Navarre had travelled a few days previously nearly across France, that the hoped-for son and heir might be a Bearnais born. Old Henri, her father, was waiting and praying in mortal anxiety for the event. "My daughter," said the patriarch, "in the hour of your trial you must neither cry nor

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moan, but sing a song in the dear Bearnais tongue; and so shall the child be welcomed to the world with music, and neither weep nor make wry faces." The princess promised this, and she kept her word; so that the first mortal sound which struck Henri Quatre's ear was his mother's voice feebly chanting an old pastoral song of the shepherds of Bearne.

"Thanks be to God!—a man-child hath come into the world, and cried not," said the old man. He took the infant in his arms, and, after the ancient fashion of the land, rubbed its lips with a clove of garlic, and poured into its mouth, from a golden cup, a few drops of Jurancon wine. And so was born Henri Quatre. Stand for a moment in the shadow of these tapestried curtains, and call up in the gloom a vision of the grandly eventful life which followed. An army is drawn up near Rochelle, and a lady leads a child between the lines. Coligni and the Condé head the group of generals who, bonnet in hand, surround the lady and the child; and then Jeanne D'Albret, lifting up her clear woman's voice, dedicates the little Henri to the Protestant cause in France; and with loud acclamations is the gift received, and the leader accepted by the stern Huguenot array.—The next picture. An antique room in the Louvre. The bell of St. Germain l'Auxerrois is pealing a loud alarm; arquebus shots ring through the streets, and cries and clamour of distress come maddening through the air. Pale, but firmly resolute, stands Henri, beside a young man richly, but negligently, dressed, who, after speaking wildly and passionately to him, snatches up an arquebus—

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stands for a moment as though about to level it at his unshrinking companion, and then exclaiming like a maniac, "*I'l faut que je tue quelq'un,*" flings open the lattice, and fires without. Henri and Charles IX. on the night of the St. Bartholemew.—Another vision. A battle-field: Henri surrounded by his eager troops—the famous white plume of Ivry rising above his helmet:

> "And if my standard-bearer fall, as fall full well he may,
> For never saw I promise yet of a more bloody fray;
> Charge where you see this white plume shine amid the ranks of war,
> And be your oriflamme to day, the helmet of Navarre."

—Solemn organ music floating through cathedral aisles must introduce the next scene. The child who was dedicated to the cause of Protestantism kneels before a mitred priest. "Who are you?" is the question put. "I am the king." "And what is your request?" "To be admitted into the pale of the Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church."—Again a change. Henri the King of France, and Rosny, Duke de Sully, labouring amid papers, calculations, and despatches, to elevate and make prosperous the great kingdom of France. "I would," said the king, "that every subject of mine might have a fat fowl in his pot every Sunday."—Take another: a gay and courtly scene. A glittering mob of courtiers surround a plain ferryman, who, in answer to the laughing questions of the monarch, whom the boatman does not know, admits that "the king is a good sort of fellow enough, but that he has a jade of a mistress, who is continually wanting fine gowns

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and trumpery trinkets, which the people have to pay for;—not, indeed, that it would signify so much if she were but constant to her lover; but they did say that——." Here a lady, with burning cheeks, and flashing eyes, exclaims: "Sire, that fellow must be hanged forthwith!" "Sire!"—the boatman gazes in astonishment on his questioner. "Tut, tut," is the reply; "the poor fellow shall no longer pay *corveé* or *gabelle,* and so will he sing for the rest of his days, Vive Henri—Vive Gabrielle!"—Another scene: in the library and working room of the great king, and his great minister. The monarch shews a paper, signed with his name, to his counsellor. It is a promise of marriage to Henriette d'Entragues. Sully looks for a moment at his master, then tears up the instrument, and flings the fragments on the earth. "Are you mad, duke?" shouts Henri. "If I am," was the reply, "I should not be the only madman in France." The king takes his hand, and does him justice.—Yet one last closing sketch. In a huge gilded coach in the midst of a group of splendidly dressed courtiers, sits the king. There is an obstruction in the street. The *cortège* stops; the lackeys leave it to clear the way; when a moody-browed fanatic, with flaming eyes, and red hair all on end, bounds into the carriage—a poniard gleaming above his head—and in a moment the Good King, stabbed with three mortal wounds, has gone home to his fathers. All is over: Henri Quatre is historical!

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE VAL D'OSSAU—THE VIN DE JURANCON—THE OLD BEARNE COSTUME—THE DEVIL AND THE BASQUE LANGUAGE—PYRENEAN SCENERY—THE WOLF—THE BEAR—A PYRENEAN AUBERGE—THE FOUNTAIN OF LARUNS, AND THE EVENING SONG.

THE valley of Ossau, one of the finest and most varied of the clefts running deep into the Pyrenees, opens up behind Pau, and penetrates some thirty miles into the mountains, ending in two narrow horns, both forming *cul de sacs* for all, save active pedestrians and bold muleteers, the bathing establishment of Eaux Bonnes being situated in one, and that of Eaux Chaudes in the other. I was meditating as to my best course for seeing some of the mountain scenery, as I hung over the parapet of the bridge beneath the castle, and watched the pure, foaming waters of the Gave bursting over their rocky bed beneath, when a little man, with a merry red face, and a wonderfully long mouth, continually on the grin, dressed in a species of imitation of English sporting costume—in an old cut-away coat, and what is properly called a bird's-eye choker—the effect of which, however, was greatly taken off by sabots—addressed me, half in French, half in what he called English :—Did I wish to go to the baths, or anywhere else in the hills ? The diligences had stopped

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running for the season; but what of that? he had plenty of horses and vehicles: he would mount me for the fox-hounds, if I wished. Oh, he was well known to, and highly respected by, Messieurs les Anglais; and it was therefore a fortunate thing for me to have fallen in with him. The upshot of a long conversation was, that he engaged to drive me up the glen with his own worshipful hands, business being slack at the time, and that he was to be as communicative as he might touching the country, the people, their customs, and all about them. The little man was delighted with this last stipulation, and observed it so faithfully, that for the next two days his tongue never lay; and as he was a merry, sensible little fellow enough, and thoroughly good-natured, I did not in the least repent my bargain. Off we went, then, in a lumbering old nondescript vehicle, drawn by a raw-boned white horse, who, however, went through his work like a Trojan. My driver's name was M. Martin; and the first thing he did was to pull up at the first public-house outside of Pau.

"Look up there!" he said, pointing to a high-wooded ridge to the right; "there are the Jurancon vineyards—the best in the Pyrenees; and here we shall have a *coup-d'étrier* of genuine old Jurancon wine."

Remembering Henri Quatre's first beverage, I had no objection. The wine, which is white, tastes a good deal like a rough *chablis*, and is very deceptive, and very heady: I would advise new-comers to the Pyrenees to use it but gingerly. The garrison of Pau was changed while I was there, and the new

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soldiers were going rolling about the streets—some of them madly drunk, from the effects of this fireily intoxicating, yet mildly tasting wine. Our road lay along the Gave—a flashing, sparkling mountain-stream, running amid groups of trees, luxuriant coppice-wood, and small fields of yellow Indian corn. Many were the cottages and clusters of huts, half-hidden amid the vines, which are trailed in screens and tunnels from stake to stake, and tree to tree; and, on each side of the way, hedges of box-wood, growing in luxuriant thickets, which would delight the heart of an English gardener—gave note of one of the characteristic natural harvests of the Pyrenees. The soil and the climate are, indeed, such, that the place which, in more northern mountain regions, would be occupied by furze and heather, is hereabouts taken up by perfect thickets and jungles of thriving box-wood; while the laurel and rhododendron grow in bushy luxuriance. Charming, however, as is the landscape, and thoroughly poetic the first aspect of the cottages, they are in reality wretched, ricketty, and unwholesome hovels. In fact, poor huts, and a mountain country, go almost invariably together. In German Switzerland, the cottages are miserable; and every body knows what an unwindowed stye is a Highland turf-built bothy. So of the Pyrenean cottages: many of them—mere hovels of wood and clay, so rickety-looking, that one wonders that the first squall from the hills does not carry them bodily away—are composed of one large, irregular room, having an earthen floor, with black, smoky beams stretching across beneath the thatch.

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Two or three beds are made up in the darkest corners; festoons of Indian corn, onions, and heads of garlic are suspended from the rafters; and opposite the huge open fireplace is generally placed the principal piece of furniture of the apartment—a lumbering pile of a dresser, garnished with the crockery of the household. In a very great proportion of cases, the windows of these dwellings are utterly unglazed; and when the rough, unpainted outside shutters are closed, the whole interior is in darkness. The people, however, seem better fed and better clothed than the German Switzers. In the vicinity of Pau, the women wear the brightest silk handkerchiefs on their heads, are perfectly dissipated in the matter of gaudy ribbons, and cut their petticoats of good, fleecy, homespun stuff, so short as to display a fair modicum of thick rig-and-furrow worsted stockings. The men, except that they wear a blue bonnet—flat, like that called Tam O'Shanter in Scotland—are decently clad in the ordinary blouse. It is as you leave behind the influence of the town, that you come upon the ancient dresses of the land. Every glen in Bearne has its distinguishing peculiarities of costume; but cross its boundary to the eastward, and you relapse at once into the ordinary peasant habiliments of France—clumsy, home-cut coats only being occasionally substituted for the blouse.

The old Bernais costume is graceful and picturesque; and as we made our way up into the hills, we soon began to see specimens; and hardly one of these but was borne by a fine-looking, well-developed man, or a black-eyed and stately stepping woman.

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The peasantry of Ossau are indeed remarkable, notwithstanding their hard work and frequent privations, for personal beauty. They have little or no real French blood in their veins; indeed, I believe the stock to be Spanish, just as the beauties of Arles, out of all sight the finest women in France, are in their origin partly Italian, partly Saracen. The women of Ossau are as swarthy as Moors, and have the true eastern dignity of motion, owing it, indeed, to the same cause as the Orientals—the habit of carrying water-vases on their heads. Their faces are in general clearly and classically cut—the nose thin and aquiline—the eye magnificently black, lustrous, and slightly almond-shaped—another eastern characteristic. The dress, as I have said, is graceful, and the colours thoroughly harmonious. A tight-fitting black jacket is worn over a red vest, more or less gaudily ornamented with rough embroidery, and fastening by small belts across the bosom. On the head, a sort of capote or hood of dark cloth, corresponding to that of the jacket and petticoat, is arranged. In good weather, and when a heavy burden is to be carried, this hood is plaited in square folds across the crown of the head, forming a protection also from the heat of the sun. In cold and rainy days, it is allowed to fall down over the shoulders, mingling with the folds of the drapery beneath. Both men and women wear peculiarly shaped stockings, so made as to bulge over the edges of the sabot, into which the naked foot is thrust. The dress of the men is of a correspondingly quaint character. On their heads they invariably wear the flat, brown bonnet, called the *berret*, and

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from beneath it the hair flows in long, straight locks, soft and silky, and floating over their shoulders. A round jacket, something like that worn by the women, knee-breeches of blue velvet—upon high days and holidays—and, like the rest of the costume, of coarse home-spun woollen upon ordinary occasions, complete the dress. The capa, or hood, is worn only in rough weather. In the glens more to the westward, low sandals of untanned leather are frequently used, the sole of the foot only being protected. Sandals have certain classic associations connected with them, and look very well in pictures, but they are fearfully uncomfortable in reality. I saw half-a-dozen peasants tramping in this species of *chaussure* through the wet streets of Pau amid a storm of snow and rain, and a spectacle full of more intensely rheumatic associations could no where be witnessed.

As we jogged along behind the grey horse, the facetious M. Martin had a joke to crack with every man, woman, and child we encountered; and the black eyes lighted up famously, and the classic faces grinned in high delight, at the witticisms.

"I suppose you are speaking Bearne?" I said.

"The fine old language of the hills, sir. French! —no more to be compared with it than skimmed milk with clotted cream."

"And you speak Spanish, too?"

"Well, if a gentleman contrabanda, who takes walks over the hills in the long dark nights, with a string of mules before him, wished to do a small stroke of business with me, I daresay we could manage to understand each other." And therewith

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M. Martin winked first with one eye, and then with the other.

"And Basque," said I, "you speak that also?"

M. Martin recoiled: "No man who ever did live, or will live, could learn a word of that infernal jargon, if he were not a born Basque. Learn Basque, indeed!—*Mon Dieu, monsieur!* Don't you know that the Devil once tried, and was obliged to give it up for a bad job? I don't know why he wanted to learn Basque, unless it were to talk to the fellows who went to him from that part of the country; and he might have known that it was very little worth the hearing they could tell him. But, however, he spread his wings, and flew and flew till he alighted on the top of one of the Basque mountains, where he summoned all the best Basque scholars in the country, and there he was for seven years, working away with a grammar in his hand, and saying his lessons like a good little boy. But 'twas all no use; he never could keep a page in his head. So one fine morning he gave a kick to the books with one foot, and a kick to the masters with the other, and flew off—only able to say 'yes' and 'no' in Basque, and that with such a bad pronunciation that the Basques could n't understand him."

This authentic anecdote brought us to that portion of the valley in which we enter really into the Pyrenean hills. Up to this point we have been traversing a gloriously wooded, and beautifully broken, country. Ridges of forests, vineyard slopes, patches of bright-green meadow land, steep, tumbling hills, wreathed with thickest box-wood, have been

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rising and falling all around. Lateral glens, each with its foaming torrent and woodland vista opening up, have been passed in close succession. Scores of villages, ricketty and poverty-struck, even in this land of fertility, have been traversed, until, gaining the height of a ridge which seems to block the way, we saw before us what appears to be another valley of a totally different character—stern, solitary, wild —a broad, flat space, lying between the hills, yellow with maize-fields, the river shining in the midst, and on either side the mountain-slopes—no mere hills this time, but vast and stately Alps, heaving up into the regions of the mist, rising in long, uniform slopes, stretching away and away, and up and up— the vast sweeps green with a richness of herbage unknown in the Alps, and faintly traced with ancient mountain-paths, leading from chalet to chalet; here and there a gully or wide ravine breaking the Titanic embankment; silver threads of waterfalls appearing and disappearing in the black jaws; and over the topmost clefts, glimpses of the snowy peaks, to which these stretching braes lead upwards. The mist lies in long, thin wreaths upon the bosom of the hills immediately around you, and you see their bluff summits now rising above it, and then gradually disappearing in the rising vapour. The general atmosphere is brighter and clearer than in the Alps, and you imagine a peak a long day's march from you within an easy climb; cottages, and even hamlets, appear perched at most impracticable heights; and every now and then, a white gash in the far-up hill-side announces a marble-quarry, and you see

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dark dots of carts toiling up to it by winding ways. These hills are but partially wooded. The sombre pine here begins to make its appearance, sometimes scattered, sometimes growing thickly—for all the world like the wire-jags set round the barrel of a musical snuff-box. The lateral valleys are, however, frequently masses of forest, and it is high up in these little frequented passes, that Bruin, who still haunts the Pyrenees, most often makes his appearance.

"But he is going," said M. Martin—"going with the wild cats and the wolves. The Pyrenees are degenerating, monsieur; you never hear of a man being hugged to death now. Poor Bruin! For, after all, monsieur, he is a gentlemanly beast; he never kills the sheep wantonly. He always chooses the best, which is but natural, and walks off with it. But the wolf—*sacré nom du diable!*—the wolf—a *coquin*—a brigand—a *Basque tonnere*—he will slaughter a flock in a night. *Mon Dieu!* he laps blood till he gets drunk on it. A *voleur*—a *mauvais sujet*—a *cochon*—a dam beast!"

"But do the Pyrenean wolves ever attack men?"

"*Sacré! Monsieur; tenez.* There was Jacques Blitz—an honest man, a farmer in the hills; he came down to Pau, when the snow was deep, and the winter hard. I saw him in Pau. Well, in the afternoon he started to go home again. It looked threatening, and people advised him to stay; but no; and off he went. Monsieur, that night in his cottage they heard, hour by hour, the howling of the wolves, and often went out, but could see nothing. Poor

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Jacques did not return, and at sunrise they were all off in search; and sure enough they found a skeleton, clean picked, and the bones all shining in the snow. Only, monsieur, the feet were still whole in the sabots: the wolves had gnawed the wood, but could not break it. 'Take off the sabots!' screamed the wife. And they did so; and she gave a shuddering gasp, and said, 'They are Jacques' feet!' and tumbled down into the snow. *Sacré peste*, the cannibals! Curse the wolves—here's to their extirpation!"

And M. Martin took a goodly pull at a bottle of Jurancon we had laid in at the last stage. He went on to tell me that sometimes a particular wolf is known to haunt a district, perhaps for years, before he gets his *quietus;* most probably a grey-haired, wily veteran, perfectly up to all the devices of the hunter, who can seldom get a shot at him. Bears flourish in the same fashion, and come to be so well known, as to be honoured with regular names, by which they are spoken off in the country. One old bear, of great size, and of the species in question, had taken up his head-quarters upon a range of hills forming the side of a ravine opening up from the valley of Ossau. He was called Dominique—probably after his fellow Bruin, who long went by the same appellation in the Jardin des Plantes, and was known by it to every Parisian. The Pyrenean Dominique was a wily monster, who had long baffled all the address of his numerous pursuers; and as his depredations were ordinarily confined to the occasional abstraction of a sheep or a goat, and

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as he never actually committed murder, he long escaped the institution of a regular battue—the ordinary ending of a bear or wolf who manages to make himself particularly conspicuous. At length the people of the district got absolutely proud of Dominique. Like the Eagle in Professor Wilson's fine tale, he was "the pride and the pest of the parish," and might have been so yet, were it not that on one unlucky day he was casually espied by the *garde forestiere.* This is a functionary whose duty it is to patrol the hills, taking note that the sheep are confined to their proper bounds on the pastures. The man had sat down to his dinner on a ledge of rock, when, looking over it, whom should he see but the famous Dominique sunning himself upon the bank below. The *garde* had a gun, and it was not in the heart of man to resist the temptation. He fired, Dominique got up on his hind legs, roaring grimly, when the contents of the second barrel stretched him on the earth. So great, however, was the *garde's* opinion of the prowess of his victim, that he kept loading and firing long after poor Dominique had quitted this mortal scene. The carcase was too heavy to be moved by a single man, but next day it was carried to the nearest village by a funeral party of peasants, not exactly certain as to whether they ought to be glad or sorry at the catastrophe.

As we were now well on in October, and as the weather had greatly broken up, much of the pleasure of my Pyrenean rambles being indeed marred by lowering skies and frequent and heavy rains—which

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were snow upon the hills—the flocks were fast descending from the upland pastures to their winter quarters in the valley and the plain. Every couple of miles or so, in our upward route, we encountered a flock of small, long-eared, long and soft woolled sheep, either trotting along the road or resting and grazing in the adjacent fields. The shepherds stalked along at the head of the procession, or, when it was stationary, stood statue-like in the fields. They were great, gaunt, sinewy men, wearing the Ossau costume, but one and all enveloped in a long, whitish cloak, with a peaked hood, flowing to the earth, which gave them a ghastly, winding-sheet sort of appearance. When a passing shower came rattling down upon the wind, the herdsmen, stalking slowly across the fields, enveloped from head to foot in these long, grey, shapeless robes, looked like so many Ossianic ghosts flitting among the mountains. Each man carried, slung round him, a little ornamented pouch, full of salt, a handful of which is used to entice within reach any sheep which he wishes to get hold of. One and all, like their brethren of the Landes, they were busy at the manufacture of worsted stockings, and kept slowly stalking through the meadows where their flocks pastured, with the lounging gait of men thoroughly broken in to a solitary, monotonous routine of sluggish life. Many of these shepherds were accompanied by their children—the boys dressed in exact miniature imitation of their fathers. Indeed, the prevalence of this style of juvenile costume in the Pyrenees makes the boys and girls look exactly like odd, quaint

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little men and women. The shepherds are assisted by a breed of noble dogs, one or two of which I saw. They are not, however, generally taken down to the low grounds, as they are frequently fierce and vicious in the half-savage state in which it is of importance to keep them, in respect to their avocations amid the bears and wolves. Among themselves, I was told that they fought desperately, occasionally even killing each other. The dogs I saw were magnificent looking fellows, of great size and power, their chests of vast breadth and depth, and their limbs perfect lumps of muscle. They appeared to me to be of a breed which might have been originated by a judicious crossing of first-rate Newfoundlands, St. Bernard mastiffs, and thorough old English bull-dogs; and I could easily believe that one wrench from their enormous square jaws is perfectly sufficient to crash through the neck vertebræ of the largest wolf.

As we neared Laruns, the mountain-slopes grew steeper and higher, and more barren and rugged; the precipices became more fearful; the mountain gorges more black and deep; and at length we appeared to be entering the deep pit of an amphitheatre dug in the centre of a group of stormy and precipitous mountains. Down in this nest lies the little mountain-town of Laruns; the steep slope of the heathy hill rising on one side of the single street from the very backs of the houses. M. Martin, on the Irish principle of reserving the trot for the avenue, whipped up the good old grey, and we rattled at a canter through the miriest street I ever

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traversed, driving throngs of lean, long-legged pigs right and left, and dispersing groups of cloaked, lounging men, with military shakos, and sabres—in whose uniform, indeed, I recognised that of my old friends, the *Douaniers* of Boulogne and Calais; for true we were approaching, not indeed an ocean, but a mountain frontier, and Spanish ground was not so distant as Shakspeare's Cliff from Cape Grinez.

We stopped in the little Place opposite a pretty marble fountain, and at the door of a particularly modest-looking auberge. As I was getting out, M. Martin stopped me: "Wait," he said, "and we will drive into the house—don't you see how big the door is?" As he spoke, it opened upon its portals. The old grey needed no invitation, and in a moment we found ourselves in a huge, dark vault, half coach-house, half stable. Two or three loaded carts were lying about, and lanterns gleamed from the gloomiest corners, and horses and mules stamped and neighed as they were rubbed down, or received their provender.

"But where is the inn?"

"The inn! up-stairs, of course."

And then I beheld a rough, wooden staircase, or, rather, a railed ladder, down which came tripping a couple of blooming girls to carry up-stairs our small amount of luggage. Following their invitation, I soon found myself in a vast parlour and kitchen and all—a great shadowy room, with a baronnial-looking fireplace, and a couple of old women sitting in the ingle-nook, plying the distaff. The fireplace and the kitchen department of the room were in the

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shadow at the back. Nearer the row of lozenge-pane windows, rose a dais—with a long dining-table set out — and smaller tables were scattered around. Above your head were mighty rafters, capitally garnished with bacon and hung-meat of various kinds. The floor rose and fell in small mountains

A PYRENEES PARLOUR.

and valleys beneath your feet; but, notwithstanding this evidence of rickettyness, every thing appeared of massive strength, and the warmth of the place, and the savour of the *cuisine*—for a French kitchen is always in a chronic state of cookery—made the room at once comfortable and appetising—ten times better than the dreary *salle* of a barrack-like hotel.

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In a few minutes, Martin, having attended to the grey, joined me, rubbing his hands. "This was the place to stop at," he said. "No use of going further. The mountains beyond were just like the mountains here; but the people here were far more unsophisticated than the people beyond. They hav 'nt learned to cheat here, yet," he whispered. "And, besides, you see a good Pyrenean auberge, and at the Wells you would only see a bad French hotel, which, I daresay, would be no novelty; while, as for price—pooh! you will get a capital dinner here for what they would charge you for speaking to the waiter there."

And so it proved. Pending, the preparation of this dinner, however, I strolled about Laruns. It is a drearily-poor place, with the single recommendation of being built of stone, which can be had all round for the carrying. The arrangement of turning the ground-floor into a stable is universal in the houses of any size, and as these stables also serve for pigstyes, sheep-folds, and poultry-yards, and as cleaning-day is made to come round as seldom as possible, it may be imagined that the town of Laruns is a highly scented one. Through some of the streets, brooks of sparkling water flow, working the hammers of feeble fulling mills. Webs of the coarse cloth produced are hung to dry from window to window, and roof to roof, and beneath them congregate groups of old distaff-plying women, lounging *duaniers*, and no end of geese standing half asleep on one foot, until a headlong charge of pigs being driven afield, or driven home, comes trampling through the mire, and clears the way in a moment.

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The auberge dinner was worthy of M. Martin's anticipations. Delicately-flavoured soup, and trout of the genuine mountain-stream breed—the skin gaily speckled, and the flesh a deep red, were followed by a roasted *jigot* of mutton, flavoured as only mutton can be flavoured which has fed upon the aromatic herbage of the high hills—the whole finished off with a capital omelette, tossed jauntily up by the neat-handed Phillis who waited upon us, and joked, and laughed, and was kept in one perpetual blush by M. Martin all through dinner-time.

At length, through all this giggling, a plate was broken.

"There's bad luck, Jeanne," said Martin.

"You know nothing about it," replied Jeanne, pertly. "Any child knows that to break a plate is good luck: it is to smash a dish which brings bad luck."

"They have all sorts of omens here in the hills," said my companion. "If a hare cross the path, it is a bad omen; and if a cow kick over the milking-pail, it is a bad omen. And they are always fancying themselves bewitched——"

"No, that we are not," interrupted Jeanne; "so long as we keep a sprig of *vervene* over the fire, we know very well that there's not a *sorciere* in all the Pyrenees can harm us."

I thought of the old couplet—

> "Sprigs of vervain, and of dill,
> Which hinder witches of their will."

As the evening closed, the little Place became quite thronged with girls, come to wash their pails

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and draw water from the fountain. Each damsel came statelily along, bearing a huge bucket, made of alternate horizontal stripes of brass and tin, upon her head, and polished like a mirror. A half-hour, or so, of gossipping ensued, frequently broken by a pleasant chorus, sung in unison by the fresh, pure voices of the whole assembly. The effect, when they first broke out into a low, wailing song, echoing amongst the high houses and the hill behind, was quite electrifying. Then they set to work, scrubbing their pails as if they had been the utensils of a model dairy, and at length marched away, each with the heavy bucket, full to the brim, poised upon her head —and with a carriage so steady and gracefully unswerving that, to look at the pails, you would suppose them borne in a boat, rather than carried by a person walking.

At night, after I had turned into as snug a bed, with as crisp, and white, and fresh linen as man could wish for, I was long kept awake by the vocal performances of a party of shepherds, who had just arrived from the hills, and who paraded the Place singing in chorus, long after the cracked bell in the little church had tolled midnight. Nine-tenths of these people have capital voices. Their lungs and throats are well-developed, by holding communication from hill to hill; and they jodle or jerk the voice from octave to octave, just as they do in the Alps. This said jodling appears, indeed, to be a natural accomplishment in many mountain countries. The songs of the shepherds at Laruns had jodling chorusses, but the airs were almost all plaintive minors,

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with long quavering phrases, clinging, as it were, to the pitch of the key-note, and only extending to about a third above or below it. The music was always performed in unison, the words sometimes French, and sometimes Bearnais. The single phrase in the former language, which I could distinguish, and which formed the burden of one of the ditties, was, "*Ma chere maitresse.*" This "*chere maitresse*" song, indeed, appeared the favourite. Over and over again was it sung, and there was a wild, melancholy beauty which grew more and more upon you, as the mellow cadence died away again and again in the long drawn out notes of "*Ma chere maitresse.*"

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CHAPTER IX.

Rainy Weather in the Pyrenees—Eaux Chaudes out of Season, and in the Rain—Plucking the Indian Corn at the Auberge at Laruns—The Legend of the Wehr-wolf, and the Baron who was changed into a Bear.

I wakened next morning to a mournful *reveillé*—the pattering of the rain; and, looking out, found the Place one puddle of melting sleet. The fog lay heavy and low upon the hills, and the sky was as dismal as a London firmament in the dreariest day of November. Still, M. Martin was sanguine that it would clear up after breakfast. Such weather was absurd—nonsensical; he presumed it was intended for a joke; but if so, the joke was a bad one. However, it must be fine speedily—that was a settled point—that he insisted on. Breakfast came and went, however, and the rain was steady.

"Monsieur," said Jeanne, "has lost the season of the Pyrenees."

"Is there not the summer of St. John to come yet?" demanded Martin.

"Yes; but it will rain at least a week before then."

What was one to do? There clearly was no speedy chance of the clouds relenting; and what was sleet with us, was dry snow further up the pass. The Peak du Midi, with visions of which I had been

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flattering myself, was as inaccessible as Chimbarozo, Spain, of which I had hoped to catch at least a Pisgah peep—for I did want to see at least a barber and a priest—was equally out of the question. During the morning a string of mules had returned to Laruns, with the news that the road was blocked up; and truly I found that, had it not been so, my first step towards going to Spain must needs have been in the direction of Bayonne, to have my passports *visèd*—those dreary passports, which hang like clogs to a traveller's feet. And so then passed the dull morning tide away, every body sulky and savage. Peasants, with dripping capas, stumbled up stairs, and sat in groups smoking over the fire; the two old women scolded; Jeanne grew quite snappish; and M. Martin ran out every moment to look at the weather, and came back to repeat that it was no lighter yet, but that it soon must clear up, positively. At length my companion and I determined upon a sally, at all events—a bold push. Let the weather do what it pleased, we would do what we pleased, and never mind the weather. So old grey was harnessed in the stable; we blockaded ourselves with wraps, and started bravely forth, a forlorn hope against the elements. We took the way to Eaux Chaudes; and the further we went, the heavier fell the rain—cats and dogs became a mild expression for the deluge. The mist got lower and lower; the sleet got colder and colder; old grey snorted and steamed; we gathered ourselves up under the multitudinous wrappers; the rain was oozing through them—it was trickling down our necks—suddenly making itself

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felt in small rills in unexpected and aggravating places, which made sitting unpleasant—collecting in handsome lakes at our feet, and pervading with one vast, clammy, chilly, freezing dampness body and soul. The whole of creation seemed resolved into a chaos of fog, mire, and rain. We had passed into what would be called in a pantomime "the Rainy Realms, or the Dreary Domains of Desolation;" and what comfort was it—soaked, sodden, shivering, teeth chattering—to hear Martin proclaim, about once in five minutes, that the weather would clear up at the next turn of the road? The dreary day remains, cold and clammy, a fog-bank looming in my memory ever since. I believe I saw the *établissment* of Eaux Chaudes; at least, there were big drenched houses, with shutters up, like dead-lights, and closed doors, and mud around them, like water round the ark. They looked like dismal county hospitals, with all the patients dead except the madmen, who might be enjoying the weather and the situation; or like gaols, with all the prisoners hung, and the turnkeys starved at the cell doors for lack of fees. I remember hearing a doleful voice, like that of Priam's curtain drawer, asking me if I would n't get out of the vehicle; but to move was hideous discomfort, bringing new wet surfaces into contact with the skin; so I croaked out, "No, no; back—back to the fire at Laruns." And so honest grey, all in a steam, splashed round through the mud; and back we went as we had come—rain, rain, rain, pitiless, hopeless rain—the fog hanging like a grey winding-sheet above us—the zenith like a pall above that,

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leaden and drear, as on a Boothia Felix Christmas Day.

There was nothing for it but the fireside. The very *douaniers* had abandoned the street—the pigs had retreated—the donkeys brayed at intervals from their ground-floor parlours; and only the maniac geese sat on one leg, croaking, to be rained on, and the marble fountain, so pretty yester-evening in a gleam of sunshine, spouted away, bringing "coals to Newcastle," with an insane perseverance which it made me sad to contemplate. Dinner was ordered as soon as it could be got ready; we felt it was the last resource. I fortunately had a change of clothes. Martin had not; but he retired for awhile, and reappeared in a home-spun coat and trowsers, six inches too long for him, which he was fain to hold up, to the enormous triumph and delight of Jeanne. At length, then, that neat-handed Phillis announced dinner.

"Stay a moment!" exclaimed Martin; "I am just going to see whether it is likely to clear up."

Out he went into the mud, and returned with the announcement that it would be summer weather in five minutes; he knew, by some particular movement of the mist. But poor Martin's weather predictions had ceased to command any credit; and the peasants around the fire shrugged their shoulders and laughed. The dinner passed off like a funeral feast. I looked upon the Place—still a puddle, and every moment getting deeper. No songs—no jodling choruses to-night, maidens of Laruns!

Sitting gloomily over the Jurancon wine, and looking at the fire, I saw a huge cauldron put on,

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and presently the steam of soup began to steal into the room. Martin and Jeanne were holding confidential intercourse, which ended in my squire's coming to me, and announcing that there was to be held a grand *épeluche* of the Indian corn, and that the soup was to form the supper of the work-people. Presently, sure enough, a vast pile of maize in the husk was brought up, and heaped upon the floor; and as the dusk gathered, massive iron candlesticks with tapers which were rather rushlights than otherwise, were set in due order around the grain. Then in laughing parties, drenched but merry, the neighbours poured in—men, women, and children—and vast was the clatter of tongues in Bernais, as they squatted themselves down on stools and on the floor, and began to strip off the husks of the yellow heads of corn, flinging the peeled grain into coarse baskets set for the purpose. The old people deposited themselves on settles in the vast chimney-nook; and amongst them there was led to a seat a tall blind man, with grizzly grey hair, and a mild smiling face.

"Ask that man to tell you a story about any of the old castles or towns hereabouts," whispered Martin; "he knows them all—all the traditions, and legends, and superstitions of Bearne."

This council was good. So, as soon as the whole roomful were at work—stripping and peeling—and moistening their labours by draughts of the valley vine—I proceeded to be introduced to the patriarch, but, ere I had made my way to him:

"Pere Bruniqul," said a good-humoured looking

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matron; "you know you always give us one of your tales to ease our work, and so now start off, and here is the wine-flask to wet your lips."

All this, and the story which followed, was spoken in Bernais, so that to M. Martin I am indebted for the outlines of the tale, which I treat as I did that of the Baron of the Chateau de Chatel-morant:—

"Sir Roger d'Espaigne," said the lady of the knight she addressed—holding in her hand the hand of their daughter Adele, a girl of six or seven years of age—"where do you hunt to day?"

"Marry," replied her husband, "in the domains of the Dame of Clargues. There are more bears there than anywhere in the country."

"But you know that the Dame of Clargues loves her bears, and would not that they should be hurt; and besides, she is a sorceress, and can turn men into animals, if she will. Oh, she practices cunning magic; and she is also a wehr-wolf; and once, when Leopold of Tarbes struck a wolf with an arblast bolt, and broke its right fore-leg, the Dame of Clargues appeared with her right-arm in bandages, and Leopold of Tarbes died within the year."

But Sir Roger was not to be talked to. He said the Dame of Clargues was no more a witch than her neighbours; and poising his hunting-spear, away he rode with all his train—the horses caracolling, and the great wolf and bear-hounds leaping and barking before them. They passed the castle of the Dame of Clargues, and plunged into the forests, where the wolves lay—the prickers beating the bushes, and the

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knights and gentlemen ready, if any game rushed out, to start in pursuit with their long, light spears. For more than half the day they hunted, but had no success; when, at last, a huge wolf leaped out of a thicket, and passed under the very feet of the horses, which reared and plunged, and the riders, darting their spears in the confusion, only wounded each other and their beasts, while three or four of the best dogs were trampled on, and the wolf made off at a long gallop down the wood. But Sir Roger had never lost sight of her, and now followed close upon her haunches, standing up in his stirrups, and couching his lance. Never ran wolf so hard and well, and had not Sir Roger's horse been a Spanish barb, he had been left far behind. As it was, he had not a single companion; when, coming close over the flying beast, he aimed a blow at her head. The spear glanced off, but blood followed the stroke, and at the same moment the barb swerved in her stride, and suddenly stopping, fell a trembling, and laid her ears back, while Sir Roger descried a lady close by, her robes rustling among the forest-herbs. Instantly, he leaped off his horse, and advanced to meet and protect the stranger from the wolf; but the wolf was gone, and, instead, he saw the Dame of Clargues with a wound in her left temple, from which the blood was still flowing.

"Sir Roger d'Espaigne," she said, "thou hast seen me a wolf—be thou a bear!" And even as she spoke, the knight disappeared, and a huge, brown bear stood before her.

"And now," she cried, "begone, and seek thy

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kindred in the forest-beasts—only hearken: thou shalt kill him who killest thee, and killing him, thou shalt end thine own line, and thy blood shall be no more upon the earth."

When the chase came up, they found the Spanish barb all trembling, and the knight's spear upon the ground; but Sir Roger was never after seen. So years went by, and the little girl, who had beheld her father go forth to hunt in the Dame of Clargues' domain, grew up, and being very fair, was wooed and wedded by a knight of Foix, who was called Sir Peter of Bearne. They had been married some months, and there was already a prospect of an heir, when Sir Peter of Bearne went forth to hunt, and his wife accompanied him to the castle-gate, even as her mother had convoyed her father when he went on his last hunting party to the woods of the Dame of Clargues.

"Sir Peter," said the lady, "hast thou heard of a great bear in the forest, which, when he is hunted, the hunters hear a doleful voice, saying, 'Hurt me not, for I never did thee any harm?'"

"Balaam, of whom the clerk tells us, ought to have that bear to keep company with his ass," said the knight, gaily, and away he rode. He had hunted with good success most of the day, and had killed both boars and wolves, when he descried, couched in a thicket, a most monstrous bear, with hair of a grizzly grey—for he seemed very old, but his eyes shone bright, and there was something in his presence which cowed the dogs, for, instead of baying, they crouched and whined; and even the knights

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and squires held off, and looked dubiously at the beast, and called to Sir Peter to be cautious, for never had such a monstrous bear been seen in the Pyrenees; and one old huntsman shouted out aloud, "My lord, my lord—draw back, for that is the bear which, when he is hunted, the hunters hear a doleful voice, saying, 'Hurt me not, for I never did thee any harm!'"

Nevertheless, the knight advanced, and drawing his sword of good Bordeaux steel, fell upon the beast. The dogs then took courage, and flew at him; but the four fiercest of the pack he killed with as many blows of his paws, and the rest again stood aloof; so that Sir Peter of Bearne was left face to face with the great beast, and the fight was long and uncertain; but at last the knight prevailed, and the bear gave up the ghost. Then all the hunt rushed in, and made a litter, and with songs and acclamations carried the dead bear to the castle, the knight, still faint from the combat, following. They found the Lady Adele at the castle-gate; but as soon as she saw the bear, she gave a lamentable scream, and said, "Oh! what see I?" and fainted. When she was recovered, she passed off her fainting fit upon terror at the sight of such a monster; but still, she demanded that it should be buried, and not, as was the custom, cut up, and parts eaten. "Holy Mary!" said the knight, "you could not be more tender of the bear if he were your father." Upon which, Adele grew very pale; but, nevertheless, she had her will, and the beast was buried.

That night Sir Peter de Bearne suddenly rose in

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his sleep, and, catching up arms which hung near him, began to fight about the room, as he had fought with the bear. His lady was terrified, and the varlets and esquires came running in, and found him with the sweat pouring down his face, and fighting violently—but they could not see with what. None could approach him, he was so savage, and he fought till dawn, and returned, quite over-wearied, to his bed. Next morning he knew nothing of it; but the next night he rose again; and the next, and the next—and fought as before. Then they took away his weapons, but he ranged the castle through, till he found them, and then fought more furiously than ever, till, at length, he was accustomed to fall on his knees with weakness and fatigue. Before a month had passed, you would not have known Sir Peter: he seemed twenty years older; he could hardly drag one foot after the other; and he fell melancholy and pined—for at last he knew that the curse of the bear was upon him, and that he was not long for this world. Many then advised to send for the Dame of Clargues, who was still alive, but old, and who was more skilful in such matters than any priest or exorcist on this side of Paris: and at last she was sent for, and arrived. The scar upon her forehead was still to be seen; her grey hair did not cover it.

"Lady," said she to the Lady of Bearne, "did you ever see your father?"

"Yes, truly; the very day he went forth a-hunting and never returned, I saw him, and I yet can fancy the face before me."

"Thou wilt see it to-night."

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"Then my foreboding—that strange feeling—was true. Oh! my father—my husband."

Midnight came, and, worn and haggard, Sir Peter de Bearne rose again to renew his nightly combat. He staggered and groaned, and his strength was spent, and those who stood round sang hymns and prayed aloud. At length the knight shrieked out with a fearful voice—the first time he had spoken in all his dreary sleep-fighting—"Beast, thou hast conquered!" and fell back upon the floor, his limbs twisting like the limbs of a man who is being strangled; and Adele screamed aloud.

"Look, minion, look!" exclaimed the Dame of Clargues to the lady—passing at the same time her hand over the lady's eyes.

"O God!" cried Adele—"my father kills my husband;" and she fell upon the floor, and she and the unborn babe died together, and Sir Peter de Bearne was likewise lifted lifeless from the spot.

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CHAPTER X.

TARBES—BAGNERRE DE BIGORRE—PIGEON-CATCHING—FRENCH COMMIS VOYAGEURS—THE KING OF THE PYRENEAN DOGS—THE LEGEND OF ORTHON, WHO HAUNTED THE BARON OF CORASSE.

THE next day by noon—still raining—I was at Pau; and having bidden adieu to M. Martin, started for Bagnerre de Bigorre by Tarbes, the great centre of Pyrenean locomotion. Here, as at Bordeaux, you are on ancient English ground. The rich plain all around you is the old County of Bigorre, which was given up to England as portion of the ransom of King John of France; and here to Tarbes came, with a gallant train, the Black Prince, to visit the Count of Argmanac—the celebrated Gaston Phœbus, Count of Foix—leaving his strong Castle of Orthon, to be present at the solemnity. The life and soul of Tarbes now consist of the scores of small cross-country diligences, which start in every direction from it as a common centre. The main feature of the town is a huge square, nine-tenths of the houses being glaring whitewashed hotels, with *messageries* on the ground-

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floors. Diligences by the score lie scattered around; and every now and then the dogs'-meat old horses who draw them go stalking solemnly across the square beneath the stunted lime-trees. There is an adult population of conductors, with silver ear-rings, and their hands in their pockets, always lounging about; and a juvenile population of shoe-blacks, who swarm out upon you, and take your legs by storm. Tarbes is the best place—excepting, perhaps, Arles—for getting your boots blacked, I ever visited. If you were a centipede, and had fifty pairs of Wellingtons, they would all be shining like mirrors in a trice. How these boys live, I cannot make out, unless, indeed, upon the theory that they black their shoes mutually, and keep continually paying each other. Bagnerre is about sixteen miles distant; and a mountain of a diligence, not so much laden with luggage as freighted with a cargo, conveyed me there in not much under four hours; and I repaired—it was dusk, and, of course, raining—to the Hotel de France—one of the huge caravansaries common at watering-places. A buxom lass opened the wicket in the Porte Cochere.

"I can have a room?"

"Oh, plenty!"

And we stepped into the open court-yard. The great hotel rose on two sides, and a small *corps de logis* on the two others.

"Wait," said the girl, "until I get the key."

And off she tripped. The key! Was the house shut up? Even so. I was to have a place as big as a hospital to myself. The door opened; all was

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darkness and a fusty smell. The last family had been gone a fortnight. Our footsteps echoed like Marianne's. It was decidedly a foreign edition, uncarpeted and waxy-smelling, of the "Moated Grange." I was ushered into a really splendid suite of rooms—of a decidedly grander nature than I ever occupied before, or ever occupied since.

"The price is the price of an ordinary bedroom. Monsieur may choose whatever room he pleases; and the *table-d'hôte* bell rings at six."

This, at all events, was reassuring. Then my conductress retreated; the doors banged behind her, and I felt like a man shut up in St. Peter's. The silence in the house was dreadful. I was fool enough to go and listen at the door: dead, solemn silence—a vault could not be stiller. I would have given something handsome for a cat, or even a mouse; a parrot would have been invaluable—it would have shouted and screamed. But no; the hush of the place was like the Egyptian darkness—it was a thick silence, which could be felt. At length the *table-d'hôte* bell rang. The *salle à manger* was in the building across the yard. Thither I repaired, and found a room, or rather a long corridor, big enough to dine a Freemason's or London Tavern party, with a miraculously long table, tapering away into the distance. Upon a few square feet of this table was a patch of white cloth; and upon the patch of cloth one plate, one knife and fork, and one glass. This was the *table-d'hôte*, and, like Handel, "I was de kombany."

Next day the weather was no better; but I was

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desperate, and sallied out in utter defiance of the rain; but such a dreary little city as Bagnerre, in that wintry day, was never witnessed. I never was at Herne Bay in November, nor have I ever passed a Christmas at Margate; but Bagnerre gave me a lively notion of the probable delights of the dead season at either of these favourite watering-places. The town seemed defunct, and lying there passively to be rained on. Half the houses are lodging-places and hotels; and they were all shut up—ponderous green outside shutters dotting the dirty white of the walls. Hardly a soul was stirring; but ducks quacked manfully in the kennels, and two or three wretched donkeys—dreary relics of the season—stood with their heads together under the lime-trees in the Place. I retreated into a *café*. If there were nobody in France but the last man, you would find him in a *café*, making his own coffee, and playing billiards with himself. Here the room was tolerably crowded; and I got into conversation with a group of townspeople round the white Fayence stove. I abused the weather—never had seen such weather—might live a century in England, and not have such a dreary spell of rain—and so forth. The anxiety of the good people to defend the reputation of their climate was excessive. They were positively frightened at the prospect of a word being breathed in England against the skies of the Pyrenees in general, and those of Bagnerre in particular. The oldest inhabitant was appealed to, as never having remembered such weather at Bagnerre. As for the summer, it had been more than heavenly. All the springs were delight-

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ful; the autumns were invariably charming; and the winters, if possible, the best of the four. The present rain was extraordinary—exceptional—a sort of phenomenon, like a comet or a calf with two heads. One of these worthies, understanding that however strong my objections were to fog and drizzle, I was not by any means afraid of being melted, recommended me to make my way to the Palombiere, and see them catch wild pigeons, after a fashion only practised there and at one other place in the Pyrenees. Not appalled, then, by the prospect of a three-mile pull up-hill, I made my way through the narrow suburban streets, and across the foaming Adour, here a glorious mountain-stream, but already made useful to turn numerous flour-mills, and to drive the saws and knives by which the beautiful marble of the Pyrenees is cut and polished. Hereabouts, in the straggling suburbs, the whole female and juvenile population were clustered, just within the shelter of the open doors, knitting those woollen jackets, scarfs, and so forth, which are so much in vogue amongst the visitors in the season. There was one graceful group of pretty girls, the eldest not more than four years of age, pursuing the work in a shed open to the street, seated round a loom, at which a good-natured-looking fellow was operating.

"That is a beautiful scarf," I said to the girl next me; "how much will they give you for making it?"

The weaver paused in his work at this question. "Tell the gentleman, my dear, how much Messieurs So-and-so give for knitting that scarf."

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"Two liards," said the little girl.

Two liards, or half a solitary sous! This was worse than the shirt-makers at home.

"It is a bad trade now," said the weaver. "She is a child; but the best hands can't make more than big sous where they once made francs; but all the trades of the poor are going to the devil. I don't think there will be any poor left in twenty years—they will be all starved before then."

This led to a long talk with my new friend, who was a poor, mild, meek sort of man—a thinker, after his fashion, totally uninstructed—he could neither read nor write—and a curious specimen of the odd twists which unregulated and unintelligent ponderings sometimes give a man's mind. His grand notion seemed to be, that whatever might be the isolated crimes and horrors now and then committed upon the earth, the most terrible and malignant species of perverted human ingenuity was—the employment of running streams to work looms.

"Was water made to weave cloth?" he asked. "Did the power that formed the Adour intend its streams to be made use of to deprive an honest man of his daily bread? He would uncommonly like to find the orator who would make that clear to his mind. It was terrible to see how men perverted the gifts of Nature! How could I, or any one else, prove to him that the water beside us was intended to take the place of men's arms and fingers, and to be used, as if it were vital blood, to manufacture the garments of those who lived upon its banks?"

I ventured to hint, that running water might

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occasionally be put to analagous, yet by no means so objectionable uses; and I instanced the flour and maize mill, which was working merrily within a score of paces of us. For a moment, but for a moment only, my antagonist was staggered. Then recovering himself, he inquired triumphantly whether I meant to say that the process of grinding corn was like the process of weaving cloth? It was curious to observe the confusion in the man's mind between *analogy* and *resemblance*. As I could not but admit that the two operations were conducted quite in a different fashion, my gratified opponent, not to be too hard upon me, warily changed the immediate subject of conversation. I was not a native of this part of France? Not a native of France at all? Then I came from some place far away? Perhaps from across the sea? From England! Ah! well, indeed, there was an English lady married, about five miles off—Madame ——. Of course I knew her? No? Well, that was odd. He would have thought that, coming from the same place, I ought to know her. However—were there many hand-loom weavers like himself in England? No, very few indeed. What! did they weave by water-power there, too? were the folks as bad as some of the people in his country? I explained that, not being so much favoured in the way of water-privilege, the people of England had resorted to steam.

The poor weaver was quite overcome at this crowning proof of human malignity. It was more horrible even than the water-atrocities of the Pyrenees.

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"Steam!—he repeated the word a dozen times over, shaking his head mournfully at each iteration, —"Steam! Ah, well, what is this poor unhappy world coming to?"

Then rousing himself, and sending the shuttle rattling backwards and forwards through the web, he added heartily: "After all, their moving iron and wood will never make the good, substantial, well-wearing cloth woven by honest, industrious flesh and blood."

Who would have the heart to prescribe cold political economy in such a case? I left the good man busily pursuing his avocation, and lamenting over the perversity of making broad-cloth by the aid of boiling water.

Stretching manfully up hill, by a path like the bed of a muddy torrent, I was rewarded by a sudden watery blink of sunshine. Then the wind began to blow, and vast rolling masses of mist to move before it. From a high ridge, with vast green slopes, all dotted with sheep, spreading away beneath until they blended with the corn-land on the plain, Bagnerre appeared, the great white hotels peeping from the trees, and the whole town lying as it were at the bottom of a bowl. It must be fearfully hot in summer, when the sun shines right down into the amphitheatre, and the high hills about, deaden every breeze. At present, however, the wind was rising to a gale, and blowing the heavy clouds right over the Pyrenees. Attaining a still greater height, the scene was very grand. On one side was a confused sea of mountain-peaks and ridges, over which floated masses

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of wreathing fog, flying like chased phantoms before the northern wind. Now a mountain-top would be submerged in the mist, to re-appear again in a moment. Anon I would get a glimpse of a long vista of valley, which next minute would be a mass of grey nonentity. The mist-wreaths rose and rolled beneath me and above me. Sometimes I would be enveloped as in a dense white smoke; then the fog-bank would flee away, ascending the broad breast of the hill before me, and wrapping trees, and rocks, and pastures in its shroud. All this time the wind blew a gale, and roared among the wrestling pines. Sometimes the sun looked out, and lit with fiery splendour the rolling masses of the fog, with some partial patch of landscape; and, altogether, the effect, the constant movement of the mist, the wild, hilly landscape appearing and disappearing, the glimpses occasionally vouchsafed of the distant plain of Gascony, sometimes dimly seen through the driving vapours, sometimes golden bright in a partial blaze of sunshine,—all this was very striking and fine. At length, however, I reached the Palombiere, situated upon the ridge of the hill—which cost a good hour and a half's climb. Here grow a long row of fine old trees, and on the northern side rise two or three very high, mast-like trees of liberty, notched so as to allow a boy as supple and as sure-footed as a monkey to climb to the top, and ensconce himself in a sort of cage, like the "crow's nest" which whalers carry at their mast-heads, for the look-out. I found the fowlers gathered in a hovel at the foot of a tree; they said the wind was too high for the

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pigeons to be abroad; but for a couple of francs they offered to make believe that a flock was coming, and shew me the process of catching. The bargain made, away went one of the urchins up the bending pole, into the crow's-nest—a feat which I have a great notion the smartest topman in all Her Majesty's navy would have shirked, considering that there were neither foot-ropes or man-ropes to hold on by. Then, on certain cords being pulled, a whole screen of net rose from tree to tree, so that all passage through the row was blocked.

"Now," said the chief pigeon-catcher, "the birds at this season come flying from the north to go to Spain, and they keep near the tops of the hills. Well, suppose a flock coming now; they see the trees, and will fly over them—if it wasn't for the *pigeonier*."

"The *pigeonier!* what is that?"

"We're going to show you." And he shouted to the boy in the crow's nest, "Now Jacques!"

Up immediately sprang the urchin, shouting like a possessed person—waving his arms, and at length launching into the air a missile which made an odd series of eccentric flights, like a bird in a fit.

"That is the pigeonier," said the fowler; "it breaks the flight of the birds, and they swoop down and dash between the trees—so."

He gave a tug to a short cord, and immediately the wall of nets, which was balanced with great stones, fell in a mass to the ground.

"Monsieur will be good enough to imagine that the birds are struggling and fluttering in the meshes."

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At Bagnerre there is a marble work—that of M. Géruset—which I recommend every body to visit, not to see marble cut, although that is interesting, but to pay their respects to, I believe, the grandest dog in all the world—a giant even among the canine giants of the Pyrenees. I have seen many a calf smaller than that magnificent fellow, who, as you enter the yard, will rise from his haunches, like a king from his throne, and, walking up to you with a solemn magnificence of step which is perfect, will

MARBLE WORKS AT BAGNERRE.

wag his huge tail, and lead you—you cannot misunderstand the invitation—to the counting-house door. For vastness of brow and jaw—enormous breadth and depth of chest, and girth of limb, I never saw this creature equalled. The biggest St. Bernard I ever came across was almost a puppy to him. A tall man may lay his hand on the dog's back without the least degree of stoop; and the animal could not certainly stand erect under an ordinary table.

"I suppose," I said to the clerk who showed

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me the works, "you have had many offers for that dog?"

"My employer," he replied, "has refused one hundred pounds for him. But, even if we wished, we could not dispose of him: he is fond of the place and the people here; so that, though we might sell him, he would n't go with his new master; and I would like to see any four men in Bagnerre try to force him."

That evening I fortunately did not include the whole company at the *table-d'hôte*. There was a young gentleman very much jewelled, and an elderly lady also very strongly got up in the way of brooches and bracelets, to whom the young gentleman was paying very assiduous but very forced attention. The lady was sulky, and sent *plat* after *plat* untasted away; and when her companion, as I thought, whispered a remonstrance, she snubbed him in great style; at which he bit his lip, turned all manner of colours, and then got moodily silent. I suspected that the young gentleman had married the old lady for her money, and was leading just as comfortable a life as he deserved. But, besides them, we had a couple of the gentlemen who are to be more or less found in every hotel in France—*commis voyageurs*, or commercial travellers. By the way, the aristocratic Murray lays his hand, or rather his "Hand-book," heavily about the ears of these gentlemen—castigating them a good deal in the Croker style, and with more ferocity than justice: "A more selfish, depraved, and vulgar, if not brutal set, does not exist;" "English gentlemen will take good care to

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keep at a distance from them," and "English ladies will be cautious of presenting themselves at a French *table-d'hôte*, except"—in certain cases specified. Now, I agree with Mr. Murray, that commercial travellers, French and English, are not distinguished by much polish of manner, or elegance of address; on the contrary, the style of their proceedings at table is frequently slovenly and coarse, and their talk is almost invariably "shop." In a word, they are not educated people, or gentlemen. But when we come to such expressions as "selfish, brutal, and depraved," I think most English travellers in France will agree with me, that the aristocratic hand-book maker is going more than a little too far. I have met scores of clever and intelligent *commis voyageurs*—hundreds of affable, good-humoured ones—thousands of decent, inoffensive ones. In company with a lady, I have dined at every species of *table-d'hôte*, in every species of hotel, from the Channel to the Mediterranean, and the Bay of Biscay to the Alps, and I cannot call to mind one instance of rudeness, or voluntary want of civility, from one end of our journey to the other; while scores and scores of instances of attention and kindness—more particularly when it was ascertained that my companion was in weak health—come thronging on me. I know that the French *commis voyageur* looks after his own interest at table pretty sharply, and also that he is quite deficient in all the elegant little courtesies of society; but to say that he is brutal or depraved, because he is not a *petit maître* and an *elegant*, is neither true nor courteous. If there be any set of Frenchmen to

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whose conduct at *table-d'hôtes* strong expressions may be fairly applied, it is French officers, who sprung from a rank often inferior to that of the bagman, and, with all the coarseness of the barracks clinging to them, frequently cluster together in groups of half-a-dozen—scramble for all that is good upon the table—eat with their caps on, which the *commis voyageur* only does in winter, when the bare and empty *salle* is miserably cold—and in general behave with a coarse rudeness, and a tumultuous vulgarity, which I never saw private soldiers guilty of, either here or in France.

But I must hurry my Pyrenean sketches to an end. The true South—I mean the Mediterranean-washed provinces—still lie before me; and I must perforce leap almost at a bound over a long and interesting journey through the little-known towns of the eastern Pyrenees—quiet, sluggish, tumble-down places, as St. Gaudens, St. Girons, and St. Foix, possessed neither of pump-rooms, nor warm-springs, but vegetating on, lazily and dreamily, in their glorious climate—for, after all, it does sometimes stop raining, and that for a few blazing months at a time, too. I would like to sketch St. Gaudens, with its broad-eaved, booth-like shops, and the snug town-hall, with pictures of old prefects and wigged *fermiers generaux*, into which they introduced me, and where they set all their municipal documents before me, when I applied for some information as to the landholding of the district. I would like to sketch at length a curious walled village on the head waters of the Garonne—a dead-and-gone sort

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of place, of which I asked an old man the name. "A poor place, sir," he said; "a poor place. Not worth your while looking at. All poor people here, sir—poor people; not worth your while speaking to. And the name—oh, a poor name, sir—not worth your while knowing; but, if you insist—why, then, it's Valentine." I would like to sketch the merry population in the hills round that dead-and-gone village—half farmers, half weavers, like the Saddleworth peasants, in Yorkshire—a jolly set—all sporting men, too, who give up their looms, and go into the woods after bears as boldly as Sir Peter de Bearne. And I would like, too, to try to bring before my reader's eye the viney valley of the Ariege, and the deep ravines through which the stream goes foaming, spanned by narrow bridges, each with a tower in the centre, where the warder kept his guard, and opened and shut the huge, iron-bound doors, and dropped and raised the portcullis at pleasure. And these old feudal memorials bring me to the castles and ruined towers so thickly peopling the land where lived the bands of adventurers, as Froissart calls them, by whom the fat citizens of the towns were wont to be "*guerroyés et harriés*," and most of which have still their legends of desperate sieges, and, too often, of foul murders done within their dreary walls. Pass, as I perforce must, however, and gain Provence—there is yet one legendary tale I cannot help telling. It is one of the best things in Froissart, and a little twisting would give it a famous satiric significance against a class of bores of our own day and generation. It relates to the lord of a castle not far from

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Tarbes, and was told to Froissart by a squire, "in a corner of the chapel of Orthez," during the visit paid by the canon to Gaston Phœbus, Count of Foix—who, I am sorry to say, has been puffed, and most snobbishly exalted by the great chronicler into the ranks of the most noble chivalry, in return for splendid entertainment bestowed; whereas, in fact, Gaston Phœbus was a reckless murderer, possessed of neither faith nor honour. But, alas, the Canon of Chimay sometimes descended into the lowest depths of penny-a-lining, and "coloured" the cases just as a bribed police reporter does when a "respectable" gentleman gets into trouble. Gaston stabbed his son to death, in a dungeon; and the bold Froissart has actually the coolness to assert that the death of the heir took place, inasmuch as his father, in a rage, because he would not eat the dainties placed before him, struck him with his clenched fist, holding therein a knife with which he had been picking his nails, but the blade of which, says the lame apologist, only protruded a "groat's breadth" from his fingers,—the result being that the steel unfortunately happened to cut a vein in young Gaston's throat. The simple truth of the matter is, that the count was jealous of his son's being a favourite of the boy's mother, from whom he (the count) was separated—that he dreaded lest the wrongs of his wife might be avenged by her brother, the King of Navarre—and that he determined to starve the boy in a dungeon; but the child not dying so soon as was expected, his father went very coolly in to him, and cut his throat.

"To speak briefly and truly," says Froissart, "the

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Count de Foix was perfect in body and mind, and no contemporary prince could be compared to him for sense, honour, and liberality."

"To speak briefly and truly, Sir John Froissart," I reply, "you have written a charming and chivalrous chronicle; but you could take a bribe with any man of your time, and having done so, you could attempt to deceive posterity, and write down what you knew to be a lie, with as gallant a grace and easy swagger as the great Mr. Jonathan Wild himself."

However, there are black spots in the sun—to the legend which I promised. The Lord of Corasse—a castle, by the way, in which Henri Quatre passed some portion of his boyish days—the Lord of Corasse had a quarrel touching tithes with a neighbouring priest, who being unable to obtain his dues by ordinary legal or illegal remedies, sent a spirit to haunt the castle of Corasse. This spirit proceeded to perform his mission by making a dreadful hallabuloo all night long, and breaking the crockery—so that very soon the Lord and Lady of Corasse had to dine without platters. At length, however, the Baron managed to come to speaking terms with the demon, who was invisible, and found out that his name was Orthon, and that the priest had sent him.

"But Orthon, my good fellow," said the sly Lord of Corasse, "this priest is a poor devil, and will never be able to pay you handsomely. Throw him overboard at once, therefore, and come and take service with me."

Orthon must have been the most fickle of all the devils, for he not only acceded to the proposition

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with astonishing readiness, but took such an affection to his new lord, that he could not be got out of his bed-room at night, to the sore discomfiture of the baroness, "who was so much frightened that the hairs of her head stood on end, and she always hid herself under the bed-clothes;" while the too familiar demon, never seen, but only heard, insisted on keeping his friend, the baron, chatting all night. But the charms of Orthon's conversation at length palled, particularly as they kept the baron night after night from his natural rest; so he took to despatching the demon all over Europe, collecting information for him of all that was going on in the courts and councils of princes, and at the scene of war where there happened to be fighting. Still, as Orthon moved as fast as a message by electric telegraph, the baron found him nearly as troublesome as ever. He was eternally coming in with intelligence which he insisted upon telling, until the Lord of Corasse's head was fairly turned by the amount of news he was obliged to listen to. Never had there been so indefatigable an agent. He would have been invaluable to a newspaper—but he was boring the Lord of Corasse to death.

A loud thunder at the door at midnight. The baron would groan, for he knew well who was the claimant for admission. "Let me in. Let me in. I have news for thee from Hungary or England," as the case might be; and the baron, groaning in soul and body, would get up and let the demon in; while the latter would immediately commence his recitation:

"Let me sleep. Let me sleep, for Heaven's sake!" the victim would exclaim.

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"I have not told thee half the news," would be Orthon's reply; "I will not let thee sleep until I have told thee the news;" and he would go on with his budget of foreign intelligence till the day scared him, and left the baron and the baronness to broken and unrefreshing slumbers.

Froissart narrates that at length the demon consented to appear in a visible form to the baron; that he took the shape of a lean sow, upon which the Lord of Corasse ordered the dogs to be let loose upon the animal, which straightway disappeared, and Orthon was never seen after. I suspect, however, that Sir John was hoaxed in this respect. He clearly did not see the fun of the story, which is very capable of being resolved into an allegory—the fact being that the demon was some gentleman of the priest's acquaintance, with supernatural powers of boring whom he let loose upon the recalcitrant tithe-payer, until the arrears were at length paid up. The sow which disappeared was clearly no other than a tithe-pig.

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CHAPTER XI.

LANGUEDOC—THE "AUSTERE SOUTH"—BEZIERS AND THE ALBIGENSES—THE FOUNTAIN OF THE GREVE AND PIERRE PAUL RIQUET—ANTICIPATIONS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN—THE MISTRAL—THE OLIVE COUNTRY ABOUT BEZIERS—THE PEASANTS OF THE SOUTH—RURAL BILLIARD-PLAYING.

AGAIN in the banquette of the diligence, which, rolling on the great highway from Toulouse to Marseilles, has taken me up at Carcassone, and will deposit me for the present at Beziers. We have entered in Languedoc, the most early civilised of the provinces which now make up France—the land where chivalry was first wedded to literature—the land whose tongue laid the foundations of the greater part of modern poetry—the land where the people first rebelled against the tyranny of Rome—the land of the Menestrals and the Albigenses. People are apt to think of this favoured tract of Europe as a sort of terrestrial paradise—one great glowing odorous garden—where, in the shade of the orange and the olive-tree, queens of love and beauty, crowned the heads of wandering Troubadours. The literary and historic associations have not unnaturally operated upon our common notions of the country; and for the "South of France," we are very apt to conjure up a brave, fictitious landscape. Yet this country is no Eden. It has been admirably described, in a single phrase, the "Austere South of France." It *is* austere—grim—sombre. It never

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smiles: it is scathed and parched. There is no freshness or rurality in it. It does not seem the country, but a vast yard—shadeless, glaring, drear, and dry. Let us glance from our elevated perch over the district we are traversing. A vast, rolling wilderness of clodded earth, browned and baked by the sun; here and there masses of red rock heaving themselves above the soil like protruding ribs of the earth, and a vast coating of drowthy dust, lying like snow upon the ground. To the left, a long ridge of iron-like mountains—on all sides rolling hills, stern and kneaded, looking as though frozen. On the slopes and in the plains, endless rows of scrubby, ugly trees, powdered with the universal dust, and looking exactly like mopsticks. Sprawling and straggling over the soil beneath them, jungles of burnt-up, leafless bushes, tangled, and apparently neglected. The trees are olives and mulberries—the bushes, vines.

Glance again across the country. It seems a solitude. Perhaps one or two distant figures, grey with dust, are labouring to break the clods with wooden hammers; but that is all. No cottages—no farmhouses—no hedges—all one rolling sweep of iron-like, burnt-up, glaring land. In the distance, you may espy a village. It looks like a fortification—all blank, high stone walls, and no windows, but mere loopholes. A square church tower gloomily and heavily overtops the houses, or the dungeon of an ancient fortress rears its massive pile of mouldering stone. Where have you seen such a landscape before? Stern and forbidding, it has yet a familiar look. These scrubby, mop-headed trees—these formal square lines of huge edifices—these

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banks and braes, varying in hue from the grey of the dust to the red of the rock—why, they are precisely the back-grounds of the pictures of the renaissance painters of France and Italy.

I was miserably disappointed with the olive. It is one of the romantic trees, full of association. It is a biblical tree, and one of the most favoured of the old eastern emblems. But what claim has it to beauty? The trunk, a weazened, sapless-looking piece of timber, the branches spreading out from it like the top of a mushroom, and the colour, when you can see it for dust, a cold, sombre, greyish green. One olive is as like another as one mopstick is like another. The tree has no picturesqueness—no variety. It is not high enough to be grand, and not irregular enough to be graceful. Put it beside the birch, the beech, the elm, or the oak, and you will see the poetry of the forest and its poorest and most meagre prose. So also, to a great extent, of the mulberry. I had a vague sort of respect for the latter tree, because one of the Champions of Christendom—St. James of Spain, I think—delivered out of the trunk of a mulberry an enchanted princess; but the enforced lodgings of the captive form just as shabby and priggish-looking a tree as the olive. The general shape—that of a mop—is the same, and a mutual want of variety and picturesqueness, afflict, with the curse of hopeless ugliness, both silk and oil-trees. The fig, in another way, is just as bad. It is a sneaking tree, which appears as if it were growing on the sly, while its soft, buttery-looking branches—bending and twisting, swollen and unwholesome-looking—put you somehow in mind of diseased limbs,

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which the quack doctors call "bad legs." In fact, it seems as if the climate and soil of Provence and Languedoc were utterly unfavourable to the production of forest scenery. One of our noble clumps of oak, beech, birch, and elm, at home, is worth, for splendid picturesqueness and rich luxuriance of greenery, every fig-tree which ever grew since fig-leaves were in vogue; every olive which ever grew since the dove from the ark plucked off a branch; and every mulberry which ever grew since St. James of Spain cut out the imprisoned princess. The menestrals of Languedoc no doubt gave our early bards many a poetic lesson; but I can imagine the hopeless stare of the Southern when the Northern rhymer, in return, would chant him a jolly Friar of Copmanhurst sort of stave about the "merry greenwood," and the joys of the "greenwood tree."

As we roll along the dusty highway, intersecting the dusty fields, the dusty olives, and the dusty vines, I pray the reader to glance to the right, towards the summit of a chain of jagged, naked hills. These go by the name of the Black Mountains—a good "Mysteries of Udolpho" sort of title—and they form part of a range which separates the basin of the streams which descend to the north, and form the head waters of the Garonne, and those which descend to the south, and form the head waters of the Aude. Somewhere about 1670, the scattered shepherds who dwelt in these hills frequently observed a stranger, richly dressed, attended by two labouring-looking men, who paid him great reverence. The little party toiled up and down in the hills, and frequently erected and gathered round magical-looking instruments. "Holy

Mary!" said the peasants, "they are sorcerers, and they are come to bewitch us all!" For years and years did the richly dressed man and the two labourers haunt the Black Mountains, wandering uneasily up and down, climbing ridges, and plunging into valleys, and always seeming to seek something which they could not find. At length, upon a glaring hot summer day, they came suddenly upon a young peasant, who was quenching his thirst at a fountain.

The cavalier glanced at the spring, and caught the shepherd by his home-spun jacket. The boy thought he was going to be murdered, and screamed out; but a Louis-d'or quieted him in a moment. Then the cavalier, trembling with anxiety, exclaimed: "What fountain is this?"

"The fountain of the Greve," said the boy.

"And it runs both ways along the ridge of the hill?"

"Ay; any fool may see that half of the water goes north, and half goes south—any fool knows that."

"And I only discovered it now. Thank God!"

We shall see who the cavalier, the discoverer of the fountain of the Greve, was, when we arrive at Beziers. Meantime the reader may be astonished that, after the cold frost and snow of the Pyrenees, a week or two later in the season brought me into a region of dry parched land, the sky blue and speckless from dawn to twilight—the sun glaringly hot, and the flying dust penetrating into the very pores of the skin. But we have left the mist-gathering and rain-attracting mountains, and we have entered the "austere South," where the sky for months and

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months is cloudless as in Arabia—where, at the season I traversed it, the sun being hot by day does not prevent the frost from being keen at night; and where the mistral, or north wind, nips your skin as with knives; while in every sheltered spot the noon-day heat bakes and scorches it. But such is Languedoc.

As the evening closed in, we saw, duskily crowning a hill before us, a clustered old city, with grand cathedral towers, and many minor church steeples, cutting the darkening air. This is Beziers, where took place the crowning massacre of the Albigenses —the most learned, intellectual, and philosophic of the early revolters from the Church of Rome, and whom it is a perfect mistake to consider in the light of mere peasant fanatics, like the Camisards or the Vaudois. In this ancient city, beneath the shadow of these dim towers, more than twenty thousand men, women, and children, were slaughtered by the troops of orthodox France and Rome, led on and incited to the work by the Bishop of Beziers, one of the most black-souled bigots who ever deformed God's earth. When the soldiers could hardly distinguish in the darkness the heretics from the orthodox—although, indeed, they might have solved the problem by cutting down every intelligent man they saw—the loving pastor of souls roared out, "*Cœdite omnes, cœdite; noverit enim Dominus qui sunt ejus!*" It is to be fervently hoped, that, for the sake of the Bishop of Beziers, a certain other personage has long ago proved himself equally perspicuous and discriminating.

We pulled up at Hotel du Nord, at Beziers, just as the *table-d'hôte* bell was ringing; and I speedily

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found myself sitting down in a most gaily lighted *salon*, to a capital dinner, in the midst of a merry company. For the last ten miles of the way, I had been amusing myself by catching glimpses of a distant lighthouse; for I knew that it shone from a headland jutting into the Mediterranean. And the first glance at the Mediterranean was now my grand object of interest, as the first glance at the Pyrenees had been; and as, I remember, long ago, the first glance of France, of the Rhine, and the Alps, had each their turn. When, therefore, a dish of soles (stewed in oil, as the Jews cook them here—and the Jews are the only people in England who can cook soles,) was placed before me, I asked the waiter where the fish came from?

"*Mais, monsieur,* where should they come from, but from the sea?"

"You mean the Mediterranean?"

"*Mais certainment, monsieur;* there is no sea but the Mediterranean sea."

An observation which, coinciding with my own mental view for the moment, I quietly agreed in.

In the market-place of Beziers stands the statue of a thoughtful and handsome man, dressed in the costume of the early period of Louis Quatorze, with flowing love-locks and peaked beard. His cloak has fallen unheeded from his shoulders, as he eagerly gazes on the ground—one hand holding a compass, the other a pencil. This is the statue of Pierre Paul Riquet, feudal seigneur of Bonrepos, and the cavalier who discovered the fountain of the Greve. That fountain solved a mighty problem—the possibility of

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connecting, by means of water communication, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean—the Garonne flowing into the one, with the Aude flowing into the other; and the formation of the Canal du Midi, doubled at a stroke the value of the Mediterranean provinces of France. Francis I., although our James called him a "mere fechting fule," dreamt of this. Henri and Sully projected the scheme; but it was only under Louis and Colbert that it was executed; and the bold and resolute engineer—he lived three quarters of a century before Brindley—was Pierre Paul Riquet. This man was one of those chivalric enthusiasts for a scheme—one of those gallant soldiers of an idea—who give up their lives to the task of making a thought a fact. He had laboured at least a dozen of weary years ere the court took up the plan. He had demonstrated the thing again and again to commissioners of notabilities, ere the first stone of the first loch was laid. The work went on; twelve thousand "navvies" laboured at the task; Riquet had sunk his entire fortune in it. In thirteen years, the toil was all but accomplished. In the coming summer the Canal du Midi would be opened—when Riquet died—the great cup of his life's ambition brimming untasted at his lips. Six months thereafter, a gay company of king's commissioners, gracefully headed by Riquet's two sons, rode through the channel of the watercourses from Beziers to Toulouse, and returned the next week by water, leading a jubilant procession of twenty-three great barges, proceeding from the west with cargoes for the annual fair held on the Rhone, at Beaucaire. Since Riquet's days,

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all his plans have been, one by one, carried out. His canal now runs to Agen, where it joins the Garonne; while at the other end, it is led through the chain of marshes and lagoons which extend along the Mediterranean, from Perpignan to the delta of the Rhone, joining the "swift and arrowy" river at Beaucaire.

I have mentioned the mistral. I had heard a great deal previously about this wind, and while at Beziers, had the pleasure of making its personal acquaintance. This mistral is the plague and the curse of the Mediterranean provinces of France. The ancient historians mention it as sweeping gravel and stones up into the air. St. Paul talks of the south wind, which blew softly until there arose against it a fierce wind, called Euroclydon—certainly the mistral. Madame de Sevigne paints it as "*le tourbillon, l'ouregan, tous les diables dechainés qui veulent bien emporter votre chateau;*" and my amazement is, that the hurricane does not sometimes carry bodily off, if not a chateau, at least the ricketty villages of the peasants. I had but a taste of this wild, gusty, and most abominably drying and cutting wind; for the gale which blew for a couple of days over Beziers formed, I was told, only a very modified version of the true mistral; but it was quite enough to give a notion of the wind in the full height of its evil powers. The whole country was literally one moving cloud of dust. The roads, so to speak, smoked. From an eminence, you could trace their line for miles by the columns of white powdered earth driven into the air. As for the paths you actually traversed, the ground-down gravel was blown from the ruts, leaving the way scarred, as it were, with

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ridgy seams, and often worn down to the level of the subsidiary stratum of rock. The streaky, russet-brown of the fields was speedily converted into one uniform grey. Never had I seen anything more intensely or dismally parched up. As for any tree or vegetable but vines and olives—whose very sustenance and support is dust and gravel, thriving under the liability to such visitations—the thing was impossible. Nor was the dust by any means the only evil. The wind seemed poisonous; it made the eyes—mine, at all events—smart and water; cracked the lips, as a sudden alternation from heat to cold will do; caused a little accidentally inflicted scratch to ache and shoot; and finally, dried, hardened, and roughened the skin, until one felt in an absolute fever. The cold in the shade, let it be noted, was intense—a pinching, nipping cold, in noways frosty or kindly; while in sheltered corners the heat was as unpleasant, the blaze of an unclouded sun darting right down upon the parched and gleaming earth. All this, however, I was told, formed but a modified attack of mistral. The true wind mingles with the flying dust a greyish or yellowish haze, through which the sun shines hot, yet cheerless. I had, however, a specimen of the wind, which quite satisfied me, and which certainly enables me to affirm, that the coldest, harshest, and most rheumatic easterly gale which ever whistled the fogs from Essex marshes over the dripping and shivering streets of London, is a genial, balmy, and ambrosial zephyr, compared with the mistral of the ridiculously bepuffed climate of the South of France.

Wandering about Beziers, so as to get the features

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of the olive country thoroughly into my head, I had a good deal of conversation with the scattered peasantry—a fierce, wild-looking set of people, dressed in the common blouse, but a perfectly different race from the quiet, mild, central and northern agriculturists. Their black, flashing eyes, so brimful of devilry—their wild, straight, black hair, shooting in straggling masses over their shoulders, and the fierce vehemence of gesticulation—the loud, passionate tone of their habitual speech—all mark the fiery and hot-blooded South. Go into a cabaret, into the high, darkened room, set round with tables and benches, and you will think the whole company are in a frantic state of quarrel. Not at all—it is simply their way of conversing. But if a dispute does break out, they leap, and scream, and glare into each other's eyes like demons, and the ready knife is but too often seen gleaming in the air. Here in the South you will note the change in the style of construction of the farm-houses, which are clustered in bourgs. Everything is on a great scale, to give air, the grand object being to let the breeze in, and keep the heat out. Shade is the universal desideratum. Every auberge has its huge *remise*—a vast, gloomy shed, into which carts and diligences drive, where the mangers of the horses stand, and where you will often see the carriers stretched out asleep. In large, messagerie hotels, these *remises*, ponderously built of vast blocks of stone, look like enormous catacombs, or vaults; and the stamping and neighing of the horses, and the rumbling of entering and departing vehicles, roll along the roof in thunder.

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Near Beziers, I came upon a good specimen of the South of France bourg, or agricultural village. Seen from a little distance, it had quite an imposing appearance—the white, commodious-looking mansions gleaming cheerily out through the dusky olive-grounds. A closer inspection, however, showed the real nakedness of the land. The high, white mansions became great clumsy barns—the lower stories occupied as living places, the windows above bursting with loads of hay and straw. The crooked, devious streets were paved with filthy heaps of litter and dung. Dilapidated ploughs and harrows—their wooden teeth worn down to the stumps—lay hither and thither round the great gaunt, unpainted doorways. The window-shutters of every occupied room were shut as closely as port-holes in a gale of wind, and here and there a wandering pig or donkey, or a slatternly woman sifting corn upon a piece of sacking stretched before her door, or a purblind old crone knitting in the sun, formed the only moving objects which gave life to the dreary picture.

In this village, however, dreary as it was, I found a *café* and a billiard-table. Where, indeed, in France will you not? Except in the merest jumble of hovels, you can hardly traverse a hamlet without seeing the crossed cues and balls figuring on a gaily painted house. You may not be able to purchase the most ordinary articles a traveller requires, but you can always have a game at pool. I have frequently found billiard-rooms in filthy little hamlets, inhabited entirely by persons of the rank of English agricultural labourers. At home, we associate the game with great

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towns, and, perhaps, with the more dissipated portion of the life of great towns. Here, even with the thoroughly rustic portion of the population, the game seems a necessary of life. And there are, too—contrary to what might have been expected—few or no make-shift-looking, trumpery tables. The *cafés* in the Palais Royal, or in the fashionable Boulevards, contain no pieces of furniture of this description more massive or more elaborately carved and adorned than many I have met with in places hardly aspiring to the rank of villages. It has often struck me, that the billiard-table must have cost at least as much as the house in which it was erected; but the thing seemed indispensable, and there it was in busy use all day long. A correct return of the number of billiard-tables in France would give some very significant statistics relative to the social customs and lives of our merry neighbours. It would be an odd indication of the habits of the people, should there be found to be five times as many billiard-tables in France as there are mangles; and I for one firmly believe that such would be the result of an impartial perquisition. Besides the *billard* and the newspapers—little provincial rags, with which an English grocer would scorn to wrap up an ounce of pigtail—there are, of course, cards and dominoes for the frequenters; and they are in as great requisition all day as the balls and cues. I like—no man likes better—to see the toilers of the world released from their labours, and enjoying themselves; but after all there is something, to English ways of thinking, desperately idle in the scene of a couple of big, burly working men, sitting in the glare

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of the sun-light the best part of the day, wrangling over a greasy pack of cards, or rattling dominoes upon the little marble tables. I once remarked this to an old French gentleman.

"True—too true," he replied; "it was Bonaparte did the mischief. He made—you know how great a proportion of the country youth of France—soldiers. When they returned—those who did return—they had garrison tastes and barrack habits; and those tastes and habits it was which have brought matters to the pass, that you can hardly travel a league, even in rural France, without hearing the click of the billiard balls."

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CHAPTER XII.

THE TRACK-BOAT ON THE CANAL DU MIDI—APPROACH TO THE MEDITERRANEAN—SALT-MARSHES AND SALT-WORKS—A CIRCUS THRASHING-MACHINE—THE MEDITERRANEAN AND ITS CRAFT—CETTE AND ITS MANUFACTURED WINES, WITH A PRIEST'S VIEWS ON GOURMANDISE.

I LEFT Beziers for the Mediterranean, by Pierre Paul Riquet's canal. The track-boat passes once a-day, taking upwards of thirty-five hours to make the passage from Toulouse to Cette. The Beziers station is about a mile from the town; and on approaching it early in the morning, I found a crowd of people collected on the banks, looking at men dragging the canal with huge hooks at the end of poles. They were searching for the body of a poor fellow from Beziers, who had drowned himself under very remarkable circumstances; and just as the packet-boat came up, the corpse was raised, stark and stiff, almost from beneath it. The deceased was a *decrotteur*, or boot-cleaner, and a light porter at Beziers—a quiet, inoffensive man, who, by dint of untiring industry, and great self-denial, had scraped together upwards of two hundred and fifty francs, all of which he lent another *decrotteur*, without taking legal security for the money. After the stipulated term for the loan had elapsed, the poor lender naturally pressed for his cash. He was put off from month to month with excuses; and when, at length, he became urgent for repayment, the debtor laughed

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in his face, told him to do his best and his worst, and get his money how he could. The *decrotteur* went away in a state of frenzy, and procured and charged a pistol, with which he returned to the rascal borrower.

"Will you pay me?—ay or no?" he said.

"No," replied the other; "go about your business."

The creditor instantly levelled his pistol and fired. Down went his antagonist, doubled up in a heap on the road, and away went the assassin as hard as his legs could carry him, to a bridge leading over the canal, from the parapet of which he leaped into the water; while, as he disappeared, the *quasi* murdered man got up again, with no other damage than a face blackened by the explosion of the pistol. He had fallen through terror, for he was absolutely unscathed.

The travelling by the Canal du Midi is a sleepy and monotonous business enough. Mile after mile, and league after league, the boat is gliding along between grassy or rushy banks, and rows of poplar, and sometimes of acacia trees, the monotonous tramp of the team upon the bank mingling with the endless gurgle of the waters beneath. The towing paths are generally very lifeless. Now and then a solitary peasant, with his heavy sharp-pointed hoe—an implement, in fact, half hoe and half pick-axe—upon his shoulder, saunters up to see the boat go by; or a shepherd, whistling to his flock, paces slowly at their head, wandering to and fro in search of the greenest bits of pasture; or a handful of jabbering women, from some neighbouring bourg, will be squatted

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along the water's edge, certainly not obeying Napoleon's injunction to wash their *linge sale en famille*, but pounding away at sheets and shirts with heavy stones or wooden mallets—the counterparts of the instruments used in Scotland to "get up" fine linen, and there called "beetles." The bridges are shot cleverly. At a shout from the steersman, the postillion, who rides one of the hindmost horses of the team, jumps off, casts loose the tow-line, runs with the end of it to the centre of the bridge, drops it aboard as the boat comes beneath, catches it up again on the opposite side, flies back after his horses which have trotted very tranquilly a-head, hooks on the rope again, jumps into his saddle, cracks his long whip, and the boat is off again in full career long ere she has lost her former headway. Little of the country can be seen from the deck, but along the southern and eastern half of the canal you seldom lose sight of the dusty tops of the formal olive groves, varied now and then by a stony slope covered with ugly, sprawling vines, and as you approach the sea, dotted with white, little country houses—of which more hereafter—the glimpses of the changing picture being continually set in a brown frame of sterile hills.

The boats are long and narrow; the cabins like corridors, but comfortably cushioned and stuffed, so that you can sleep in them, even if the boat be tolerably crowded, as well as in a diligence. If there be few passengers, you will have full-length room. The *restaurant* on board is excellent—as good as that on the Garonne boats, and very cheap. Let all English travellers, however, beware of the steward's department

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on the Loire and Rhone steamers, in both of which I have been thoroughly swindled. The style of people who seemingly use the track-boat on the Canal du Midi, are the *rotonde* class of diligence passengers. Going down to Cette, there were two or three families, almost entirely composed of females, aboard; the elder ladies—horrid, snuffy old women, who were always having exclusive cups of chocolate or coffee, or little basins of soup, and who never appeared to move from the spots on which they were deposited since the voyage began.

Two of these families had canaries in cages, a very common practice in France, where the people continually try, even in travelling, to keep their household gods about them. Look at the baggage of your Frenchman *en voyage*. All the old clothes of the last dozen of years are sure to be lugged about in it. There is, perhaps, a pormanteau, exclusively devoted to old boots, and half-a-dozen pasteboard hat-boxes, with half-a-dozen hats, utterly beyond wearing. The plague of all this baggage is dreadful; but the proprietor would go through any amount of inconvenience rather than lose one stitch of his innumerable old *hardes*.

After passing the headland and dull old town of Agde, the former crowned by the lighthouse I had seen from the road to Beziers, we fairly entered into the great zone of salt swamps which here line the Mediterranean. It was a desolate and dreary prospect. The land on either side stretched away in a dead flat; now dry and parched, again traversed by green streaks of swamp, and anon broken by clear, shallow pools of water. Sometimes, again, you entered a perfect

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jungle of huge bulrushes, stretching away as far as the eye could follow, and evidently teeming with wild-ducks, which rose in vast coveys, and flew landward or seaward in their usual wedge-shaped order of flight. The sea, to which we were approaching at a sharp angle, was still invisible, but you felt the refreshing savour of the brine in the air, and now and then you caught, sparkling for a moment in the bright, hot sunshine, a distant jet of feathery spray, as a heavier wave than common came thundering along the beach. Presently, the brown waste through which we were passing became streaked with whitish belts and patches—the salt left by the evaporation of the brine, which now begins to soak and well through the spongy soil, and presently to expand into lakes and shallow belts of water. Across these, long rows of stakes for nets, stretched away in endless column, and here and there a rude, light boat floated, or a fisherman slowly waded from point to point. Great herons and cranes stood like sentinels in the shallow water, and flocks of sandpipers and plovers ran along the white salt-powdered sand. Then came on the left, or landward side, a series of tumuli of pyramidical form, some of them white, others of a dark brown, scattered over a space of scores of square miles. I wondered who were the inhabitants of this lake of the dismal swamp, and accordingly pointed out the houses, as I conceived them, to the captain.

"Houses, monsieur!" he said; "these are all salt heaps. Salt is the harvest of this country, and they stack it in these piles, just as the people inland do their corn. When the heap is not expected to be wanted

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soon, they thatch it with reeds and grass; but if they expect to get a quick sale, they don't take the trouble. So you see that some of the heaps are dark, and the others like snow-balls."

"But if there come rain?"

"Not much fear of that in this part of the world. There may be a shower, but the salt is so hard and compacted, that it will do little more than wash the dirt off."

Presently we came to the salt-making basins—great shallow lakes, divided by dykes into squares somewhat in the style of a chess-board; and here the solitude of the expanse was broken by the figures of the workmen clambering along the narrow dykes to watch and superintend the progress of evaporation. By the side of these lakes, rows of ugly rectangular cottages were erected, and slight carts drawn by two horses, one ahead of the other, moved the loads of salt from the pans, or pools, to the heaps in which it was stored. Here and there, where the ground rose a little, a thin crop of maize, or barley, appeared to have been cultivated; and it was probably some such harvest that I saw being thrashed by the peculiar process in use all through Provence and southern Languedoc. There are very few thrashing mills, even in the best cultivated parts of France. Over the vast proportion of the kingdom, the orthodox old flail bears undisturbed sway; but the farmer of the far South chooses rather to employ horse than human muscles in the work. He lays down, therefore, in a handy spot, a circular pavement, generally of brick, a little larger than the ring at Astley's. All along the swampy

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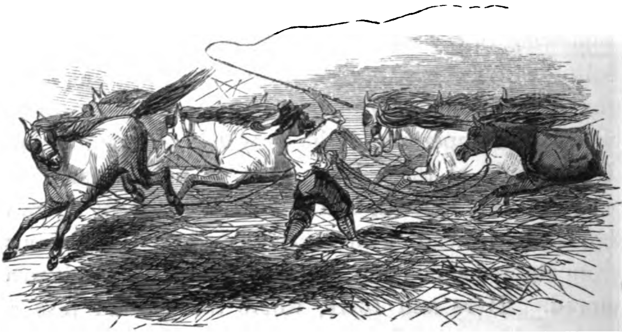
shores of the Mediterranean, traversed by the delta of the Rhone, and stretching westward towards Spain, there feed upon the scanty herbage great herds of semi-wild horses, said to have been originally of Arabian descent. These creatures are caught, when needed, much in the style of the Landes desert steeds, and every farmer has a right to a certain number corresponding with the size of his farm. When, then, the harvest has been cut, and the thrashing time comes



THRASHING CORN.

on, you may see, approaching the steeding, an unruly flock of lean, lanky, leggy horses, most of them grey, driven by three or four mounted peasants—capital cavaliers—each with a long lance like a trident held erect, and a lasso coiled at the saddle-bow. Then work commences: the wild steeds are tolerably docile, although shy and skittish. A heavy bit is forced into the mouth of each, with a long bridle attached. The creatures are arranged in a circle on the edge of the brick flooring, exactly as when Mr. Widdicombe or

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M. Franconi prepare for an unrivalled feat of horsemanship upon eight bare-backed steeds by the "Whirlwind Rider," surnamed the "Pet of the Ring," or the famous artiste, "Herr Bridleinski," the Hungarian Tamer of the Flying Steeds." The sheaves of corn are placed just where the active grooms at Astley's rake the sawdust thickest; and then, in answer to the thundering exhortations of Mr. Widdicombe and his coadjutors in the centre of the ring, and the cracking of the whips, the horses, held by their long bridles, go plunging and rearing round the arena, and, after more or less obstreperousness, settle into a shambling trot, treading out the corn as they go, and preserving the pace for a wonderful length of time. At night, the creatures are released, and left to shift for themselves. They seldom stray far from the farm, and are easily recaptured and brought back to work next day. The four-legged thrashers, I am sorry to say, are rather scurvily treated, for they get nothing in return for their labour better than straw—a poor diet for a day's trot. The first time I saw this equestrian thrashing-machine in motion, the effect was very odd. I could not dissociate it from the equestrian performance of some wandering company of high-bred steeds and "star riders." The only thing that seemed strange was, that there should be no spectators; and, after a little time, that there should be no human performers. Round and round, at a long, irregular trot, went the lanky brutes—sometimes breaking out—plunging, and taking it into their heads, as their Rochester cousin, hired by Mr. Winkle, did, to go sideways, but always reduced to obedience by a few smacking persuaders from the whip.

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But where was the illustrious Whirlwind Rider, who should have stood on all their necks at once, or the famous Bridleinski, who should have stood on all their haunches? No shrill clown's voice echoed from the circus. The stolid, bloused, straw-hatted master of the ring was a perfect disgrace and reproach to Mr. Widdicombe, who, if he had been on board the boat, would infallibly have taken refuge in the run, rather than contemplated such a melancholy mockery of his mission and his functions.

At length there gleamed before us a noble sheet of water, ruffled by a steady breeze, before which one of the Lateen-rigged craft of the Mediterranean was bowling merrily, driving a rolling wave of foam on either side of her bluff bows. This was the Lagoon, or Etang, of Thau, a salt-water lake about a dozen of miles long, and opening up by a narrow channel—on both banks of which rises the flourishing town of Cette — into the Mediterranean. For the greater part of its length, only a strip of sand and shingle interposes between the lake and the sea, and as the steamer to which we were transferred, at the end of the canal, paddled its way to Cette, we could see every moment the surf of the open ocean rising beyond the barrier. The passage along the Etang is pretty and characteristic. On the left lie, in a long, blue chain, the hills of the Cevennes — distance hiding their barren bleakness from the eye—while along the inland edge of the water, village after village, the houses sparklingly white, are mirrored in the lake, with a little fleet of lateen-rigged fishing-boats, the sails usually very ragged, pursuing their

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occupation before each hamlet. Now and then we were passed by huge feluccas, rolling away before the wind, and bound for the Canal du Midi, with great cargoes of hay and straw, heaped up half as high as the mast—the lateen-sail having to be half furled in consequence, and the captain shouting his orders to the steersman as from the top of a stack in a barn-yard. The scene reminded me greatly of the hay-barges of the Thames bringing up to London the crops of Kent and Essex.

At length we were landed among groups of Mediterranean sailors, with Phrygian caps—otherwise conical red night-caps—and ugly-looking knives in their belts. The women had the usual Naiad peculiarity of short petticoats, and wore them, too, of a showy, striped stuff, which reminded me of the Newhaven fish-wives, near Edinburgh. This Phrygian cap, by the way, is the prototype of the ordinary cap of liberty, which our good neighbours are so fond of sticking on the stumps of what they call "trees of liberty"—of painting, of carving, of apostrophising, of waving, of exalting—which, in short, they are so fond of doing everything with—but wearing. The effect, as a head-dress, on the Cette fishermen, was not unpleasant. The long, conical top, and tassel, give a degree of drapery to the figure, and the cap itself seems luxuriously comfortable to the head.

A well-appointed little omnibus rattled me through busier streets than I had seen for many a day, by open counting-houses, and under the great lateen yards of feluccas lying in rows, with their bows to the quays, and across a light, wooden swing-bridge,

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haunted by just such tarry mortals as you see about St. Katherine's docks; and at length I was set down at the wide portal of the Hotel de Poste—a straggling, airy hostelry, such as befits the hot and glaring South. Still, I had not seen the Mediterranean. The great *coup* was yet unachieved: so, getting five words of instruction from a waiter, I hurried through some narrow streets, crossed two or three more swing-bridges, skirted half-a-dozen boat-building yards, very like similar establishments in Wapping, and then suddenly emerged upon the open beach, with sand-hills, and long bent, or sea-grass, rustling in the soft southern wind, with the blue of the great inland sea stretching away, deep and lovely, before me; and with the hissing water and foam-laced inner wavelets of the surf creaming to my feet. A sensation, it will be admitted, is a pleasant thing in these *blasé* days, and the Mediterranean afforded one. There came on me a vague, crowded, and indistinct vision, at once, of schoolboy recollections and many a subsequent day-dream—of Roman galleys, *triremes* and *quadremes*, with brazen beaks and hundred oars, moving like the legs of a centipede; of all the picturesque craft of the middle-ages; of the fleets of Venice; the argosies and tall merchant-barks which carried on the rich commerce of northern Italy; of the Algerine corsairs, which so often bore down upon the Lion of St. Marks; of the quick-pulling piratical craft; the rovers who pillaged from the mouths of the Nile to the Pillars of Hercules; and of the whole tribe of modern Mediterranean vessels, which thousands and thousands of pictures

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have made classic, with their high peaked sails, and striped gaudy canvass; the whole tribe of feluccas and polacres, whereof, as I gazed, I could see here and there the scattered sails, gleaming like bird-wings upon the sea. The Mediterranean is, after all, the sea of the world: we associate it with everything classic and beautiful, either in art or climate; and although we know well that its lazy, saint-ridden seamen, and its picturesque, but dirty and ill-sailed, vessels would fly before a breeze which a North-sea fisherman or a Channel boatman would consider a mere puff,—still there is something racily and specially picturesque about the black-eyed, swarthy, copper ear-ringed rascals, and something dearly familiar about the high, graceful peaks of the sails around which they cluster. From the beach I went to the harbour, which was crowded almost to its entrance, but, for reasons to be presently alluded to, I was not sorry to recognise not one union-jack among the Stars and Stripes—Dutch and Brazilian ensigns, which were flying from every mast-head. Few Mediterranean harbours are savoury places. It will be remembered that "there shrinks no ebb in that tideless sea;" and accordingly, when the drainage of a town or a district is led into the harbours, there it stays. Marseilles enjoys a most unenviable notoriety in this respect. The horrible fluid beneath you becomes, in the summer time, despite its salt, absolutely putrid; and I was told that there had been instances in which it bred noisome and abhorrent insects andreptiles—that, literally and absolutely, "slimy things did crawl, with legs, upon the slimy sea."

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As for the stench, the richness of the steam of fat gases perpetually rising, must be smelt to be appreciated. The Marseillaise, however, have sturdy noses, which do not yield to trifles. They say the dirt preserves the ships, and besides, adds Dumas—a great favourer of the ancient colony of the Greeks—"what a fool a man must be, who, under such a glorious sky, turns his eyes down to gaze on mud and water!"

The harbour of Cette is not quite so bad, but it has no particular transparency of water to recommend it. Brave its foulness, however, and go and visit the quays for the fishing-boats, as they are returning from their night's toil. Mark the Catalan craft—you will perhaps remember that the redoubted Monte Christo's first love was a Catalan girl, of a Catalan village near Marseilles:—did you ever see more exquisitely-formed boats afloat on the water? They swim apparently on the very surface—the curve of the gunwale rising to a gondola peak at stem and stern; but yet they are most buoyant sea-boats, and I suspect their speed, particularly in light winds, would put even that of the Yankee pilot-boats to a severe test. Look, too, at their cargoes, as the slippery masses are being shovelled up in glancing, gleaming spadefuls, to the quays. Did you ever see such odd fish? Respectable haddocks, decent and well-to-do cods, and unpretending soles, would never be seen in such strange, eccentric company—among fellows with heads bigger than bodies, and eyes in their backs, and tails absurdly misplaced, and feelers or legs where no fish with well-regulated minds would

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dream of having such appendages—never was there seen such a strange *omnium gatherum* of piscatory eccentricities as the fishes of the Mediterranean.

I said that it was good—good for our stomachs—to see no English bunting at Cette. The reason is, that Cette is a great manufacturing place, and that what they manufacture there is neither cotton nor wool, Perigord pies, nor Rheims biscuits,—but wine. "*Ici*," will a Cette industrial write with the greatest coolness over his Porte Cochere—"*Ici on fabrique des vins.*" All the wines in the world, indeed, are made in Cette. You have only to give an order for Johannisberg, or Tokay—nay, for all I know, for the Falernian of the Romans, or the Nectar of the gods—and the Cette manufacturers will promptly supply you. They are great chemists, these gentlemen, and have brought the noble art of adulteration to a perfection which would make our own mere logwood and sloe-juice practitioners pale and wan with envy. But the great trade of the place is not so much adulterating as concocting wine. Cette is well-situated for this notable manufacture. The wines of southern Spain are brought by coasters from Barcelona and Valencia. The inferior Bordeaux growths come pouring from the Garonne by the Canal du Midi; and the hot and fiery Rhone wines are floated along the chain of etangs and canals from Beaucaire. With all these raw materials, and, of course, a chemical laboratory to boot, it would be hard if the clever folks of Cette could not turn out a very good imitation of any wine in demand. They will doctor you up bad Bordeaux with violet powders and rough cider—colour it with

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cochineal and turnsole, and outswear creation that it is precious Chateau Margaux—vintage of '25. Champagne, of course, they make by hogsheads. Do you wish sweet liqueur wines from Italy and the Levant? The Cette people will mingle old Rhone wines with boiled sweet wines from the neighbourhood of Lunel, and charge you any price per bottle. Do you wish to make new Claret old? A Cette manufacturer will place it in his oven, and, after twenty-fours' regulated application of heat, return it to you nine years in bottle. Port, Sherry, and Madeira, of course, are fabricated in abundance with any sort of bad, cheap wine and brandy, for a stock, and with half the concoctions in a druggist's shop for seasoning. Cette, in fact, is the very capital and emporium of the tricks and rascalities of the wine-trade; and it supplies almost all the Brazils, and a great proportion of the northern European nations with their after-dinner drinks. To the grateful Yankees it sends out thousands of tons of Ay and Moet, besides no end of Johannisberg, Hermitage, and Chateau Margaux, the fine qualities and dainty aroma of which are highly prized by the transatlantic amateurs. The Dutch flag fluttered plentifully in the harbour, so that I presume Mynheer is a customer to the Cette industrials—or, at all events, he helps in the distribution of their wares. The old French West Indian colonies also patronise their ingenious countrymen of Cette; and Russian magnates get drunk on Chambertin and Romanee Conti, made of low Rhone, and low Burgundy brewages, eked out by the contents of the graduated phial. I fear, however, that we do come

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in—in the matter of "fine golden Sherries, at 22*s*. 9½*d*. a dozen," or "peculiar old-crusted Port, at 1*s*. 9*d*." —for a share of the Cette manufactures; and it is very probable that after the wine is fabricated upon the shores of the Mediterranean, it is still further improved upon the banks of the Thames.

At dinner-time, I found myself placed by the side of a benevolent-looking old priest, with white hair, but cheeks and gills of the most approved rubicund hue, who first eyed the dishes through a pair of vast golden spectacles, and meditated profoundly ere he made a choice—waving away the eternal *bouilli* with an expression which showed that he was not the man to spoil a good appetite with mere boiled beef. This worthy, hearing me making interest with the waiter for a peculiar bottle of wine, not of native manufacture, smiled paternally, and with an approving countenance: "I would recommend," he said, softly, and in a fat voice, "you to try Masdeu; and, if you please, I will join you. I know Gilliaume (the waiter) of old. *C'est un bon enfant.*" And then, in a severe voice, "*The* Masdeu, William."

The priest was clearly at home; and presently the wine came. It had the brightly deep glow of Burgundy, a bouquet not unlike Claret, and tasted like the lightest and purest Port glorified and etherealised; in fact, it was a rare good wine.

"Ah!" said the priest, pouring out a second glass; "the vineyard where this was grown once belonged to the Church. The Knights of the Temple once drank this wine, and the Knights of St. John after them. It is a good wine."

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"The Church understood the grape," I remarked. "I have drunk Hermitage where the recluse fathers tended the vines, and have always looked upon Rhone wine as one of the reasons why the Holy Father at Avignon was long so loath to be the Holy Father at Rome."

"Wine," replied my compotator, "is not forbidden, either by the laws of God or the Church; and never was. Only the Vulgate denounces mixed wines."

"By the mixed wines prohibited in Holy Writ," said I, "I presume you understand adulterated, not watered liquors. If so, we are in a sad city of sinners."

The priest smiled, but changed the topic.

"Masdeu," he said, "is Catalan; you know the wine is grown not far from Perpignan, where the people are half Spanish. Do you know the meaning of Masdeu? It is a very old name for the vineyard, and it signifies 'God's field.'"

I thought of the difference of national character between the French and the Germans—"God's field" in France, a vineyard; "God's field" in Germany, a churchyard.

"The ancient Romans," continued my friend, liked the wines, the sweet wines of this country, better than any other growths in Gaul."

"The Romans," I said, "had a most swinish taste in wines, and dishes too. The Falernian was boiled syrup, cooked up with drugs, and tempered with salt water. Only think of mixing brine with your tipple; or of placing it in a *fumarium*, to imbibe the flavour

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of the smoke! The Romans were mere liqueur drinkers. Aniseed, or maraschino, or parfait amour, or any trash of that kind, would have suited them better than genuine, fine-flavoured wine."

"*Pourtant;*" said my friend; "you go too far; maraschino and parfait amour are not trash. Although I agree with you, that the palate which eternally appeals for sweets is in a morbid condition. But the Romans, after all, must have had tongues of peculiar nicety for some savours. A Roman epicure could tell, by the relative tenderness, the leg upon which a partridge had been in the habit of sitting at night, and whether a carp had been caught above or below a certain bridge."

"Or was it not," I asked, with hazy reminiscences of Juvenal floating about me,—"was it not a certain sewer—the Cloaca Maxima, perhaps?"

"Only," argued the priest in continuation, "I could never understand their fondness for lampreys."

"Perhaps," said I, "it is because you never tasted them after they had been fattened on slaves."

"Perhaps it is," replied the good man, musing.

By this time dinner was over, and the guests gone. We had the remains of the dessert, the pick-tooths, and another bottle of the Catalan wine to ourselves.

"You French," I ventured, "hardly seem worthy of your fine wines. You never appear to care about them; you seldom sit a moment after dinner to enjoy them; and if you relish anything more than another, it is Champagne, which, after all, is but a baby taste. All your very best wine goes to England; most of your second-class growths to Russia; and your lower

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sorts to the northern nations on the Baltic. I do n't think there is anything like a generally cultivated taste for good wine in France, and yet you are supreme in the *cuisine*."

"It was the *fermiers generaux*, and the *financiers*," replied the priest, "who made French cookery what it is. They tried to outshine the old noblesse at table; they revived truffles, and they had the first dishes of green pease, at eight hundred francs a *plat*. Next to the financiers were the chevaliers and the abbés. *Oh, mon Dieu! qu'ils étaint gourmands ces chers amis;* the chevaliers all swagger and dash; the sword right up and down—shoulder-knot flaunting—a bold bearing and a keen eye. The abbés, in velvet and silk—as fat as carps, as sleek as moles, and as soft-footed as cats—little and sly—perfect enjoyers of the gourmandise. Oh, there was nothing more snug than an *abbé commanditaire!* He had consideration, position, money; no one to please, and nothing to do."

"These were the good old times," I said.

"*Ma foi!*" replied the clerical dignitary; "they were bad times for France in general; but they were rare times for the few who lived upon it. There were Frenchmen, at any rate, then, who understood wine; at least, they drunk enough of it to understand the science, from the alpha to the omega."

We parted, after a proper degree of hand-shaking; and a quarter of an hour afterwards I was rattling along the Montpellier and Cette railway, with a ticket for Lunel in my pocket.

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CHAPTER XIII.

MORE ABOUT THE OLIVE-TREE—THE GATHERING OF THE OLIVES—LUNEL—A NIGHT WITH A SCORE OF MOSQUITOES—AIGUES-MORTES—THE DEAD LANDSCAPE—THE MARSH FEVER—A STRANGE CICERONE—THE LAST CRUSADING KING—THE SALTED BURGUNDIANS—THE POISONED CAMISARDS—THE MEDITERRANEAN.

PASSING, for the present, Montpellier, where people with consumptions used to be sent to swallow dust, as likely to be soothing to the lungs, and to breathe the balmy zephyrs of the whispering mistral, I made straight for Lunel, in order to get from thence to one of the strangest old towns in France—Aigues-Mortes. All around us, as we hurried on, were vines and olives—a true land of wine and oil. The olive-tree did not improve on acquaintance—it got uglier and uglier—more formal, and more cast-iron looking, the more you saw of it. And then it was invariably planted in rows, at regular intervals, so as to give the notion of a prim old garden—never of a wood. Like all fruit-trees in France, the olive is most carefully trimmed, and clipped, and tortured, and twisted into the most approved or fashionable shape. The man who can make his *oliviers* look most like umbrellas is the great cultivator; and the services of the peasants who have got a reputation for olive dressing are better paid than those of any agricultural labourers in France. They are eternally snipping and slashing, and turning and twist-

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ing the tree, until the unfortunate specimens have had any small degree of natural ease and harmony which they possessed assiduously wrenched out of them. And yet there are people in the South of France who are enthusiastic on the hidden beauty of the olive. There are technical terms for all the particular spreads and contortions given to the branches; and the olive amateur will hold forth to you by the hour upon the subtle charms of each. A gentleman from beyond Marseilles has dilated with rapture to me on his delight, after a residence in Normandy, in returning again to the hot South, and revisiting the dear olives, so prim, and orderly, and symmetrical—not like the huge, straggling, sprawling oaks and elms of the North, growing up in utter defiance of all rule and system.

The olives of France, this gentleman informed me, are very inferior to the trees of a couple of generations ago. Towards the close of the last century, there was a winter night of intense frost; and when the morning broke, the trees were nearly smitten to the core. That year there was not an olive gathered in Provence or Languedoc. The next season, some of the stronger and younger trees partially revived, and slips were planted from those to which the axe had been applied; but the entire species of the tree, he assured me, had fallen off—had dwindled, and pined, and become stunted; and the profits of olive cultivation had faded with it. The gentleman spoke on the subject with a degree of unction which would have suited the fall, not of the olive, but of man. It was a catastrophe which coloured his whole life. He was himself an

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olive proprietor; and very likely his fortunes fell on the fatal night as many points as the thermometer. On our way to Lunel we saw the olive-gathering just beginning; but, alas! it had none of the gaiety and bright associations of the vintage. On the contrary, it was as business-like and unexciting as weeding onions, or digging potatoes. A set of ragged peasants—the country people hereabouts are poorly dressed—were clambering barefoot in the trees, each man with a basket tied before him, and lazily plucking the dull oily fruit. Occasionally, the olive-gatherers had spread a white cloth beneath the tree, and were shaking the very ripe fruit down; but there was neither jollity nor romance about the process. The olive is a tree of association, but that is all. Its culture, its manuring, and clipping, and trimming, and grafting—the gathering of its fruits, and their squeezing in the mill, when the ponderous stone goes round and round in the glutinous trough, crushing the very essence out of the oily pulps—while the fat, oleaginous stream pours lazily into the greasy vessels set to receive it;—all this is as prosaic and uninteresting as if the whole Royal Agricultural Society were presiding in spirit over the operations. And, after all, what could be expected? "Grapes," said a clever Frenchman, "are wine-pills"—the notion of conviviality and mirth is ever attached to them; and the vintagers, when stripping the loaded branches, have their minds involuntarily carried forward to the joyous ultimate results of their labours. But who—our friends the Russians, and their cousins the Esquimaux excepted—could possibly be jolly over the idea

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of oil? It may act balsamically and soothingly; and the idea of the olive saucer, green amongst the bright decanters, does approach, in some respect, towards the production of a pleasant association of ideas; but still the elevated and poetic feelings connected with the tree are remote and dim.

It was Minerva's tree. When the gods assembled to decide the dispute between Pallas and Neptune, as to which should baptize the rising Athens, it was determined that the honour should belong to whichever of the twain presented the greatest gift to man. Neptune struck the earth, and a horse sprung to day. Minerva waved her hand, and the olive-tree grew up before the conclave. The goddess won the day, inasmuch as the sapient assemblage decided that the olive, as an emblem of peace, was better than the horse, as an emblem of war. Now, I would put this question to Olympus:—How could the olive or the horse be emblems before they were created? And, even if they were emblems, was not the point at issue the best gift—not the best allegorical symbol? I beg, therefore, to assure Neptune that I consider him to have been an ill-used individual, and to express a hope that, if he should ever again come into power, he will not forget my having paid my respects to him in his adversity.

I do not know if I have anything particular to record respecting Lunel, which is a quiet, stupid, shadowy place, but that I passed the night engaged in mortal combat with a predatory band of mosquitoes. I was warned, before going to bed, to take care how I managed the operation, and to whip my-

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self through the gauze curtains so as to allow nothing to enter *en suite*. The bed—I don't know why—had been placed in the middle of the room, and the filmy net curtains, like fairy drapery, were snugly tucked in beneath the bedding. Looking at them more particularly, I distinguished a little card, accidentally left adhering to the net, which informed me that it was the fabrication of those wondrous lace-machines of Nottingham; and I trusted that as Britannia rules the waves, she would also baffle the mosquitoes. Perhaps it was my own fault that she did not. I remembered Captain Basil Hall's admirable description of doing the wretched insects in question by leaping suddenly into bed, like harlequin through a clock-dial, and frantically closing up the momentary opening, and I performed the feat in question with as much agility as I could. But what has befallen the gallant captain, also on that night befel me. Mosquitoes shoot into a bed like the Whigs into office—through the most infinitesimal crevices—but with the entrance the resemblance ceases—once in office, with the country sleeping tolerably comfortably, the Whigs do nothing. Not so, the mosquitoes. Their policy is perfectly different, and their energies vastly greater. For a true sketch of the style of mosquito administration, I must again refer to Hall. His picture is true—true to a bite, to a scratch, to a hum. I might paint it again, but any one can see the original. So I content myself with simply stating that from eleven o'clock, P.M., till an unknown hour next morning, I was leaping up and down the bed, striking myself furious blows all over, but never, apparently,

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hitting my blood-thirsty enemies, and only now and then occasionally sinking into a momentary doze to be roused by that loud, clear trumpet of war—the very music of spite and pique and greediness of blood, circling round and round in the darkness, and ever coming nearer and nearer, till at last it ceased, and then came—the bite, as regularly as the applause after the cavatina of a prima donna. I made my appearance next morning, looking exactly as if I had been attacked in the night by measles, the mumps, swollen face, and erysipelas.

Between Aigues-Mortes and Lunel, there is no public vehicle, because there is no travelling public; and so I hired a ricketty, shandry-dan looking affair, to take me on; and away we started, under a perfect blaze of hot, sickly sunshine. The road ran due south, through the vineyards and olives, but they gradually faded away as the soil got more and more spongy, and presently we saw before us a waste of the same sort as that which I have described on approaching the sea by the Canal du Midi. Shallow pools, salt marshes, and bulrush jungles, lay flat and silent, glaring in the sunshine—the watchful crane, the sole living creature to be seen amid these desolate swamps. It struck me that John Bunyan, had he ever seen a landscape like this strange, stagnant expanse of dreariness, would have made grand use of it in that great prose poem of his. Perhaps he would have called it "Dead Corpse Land," or the Slough—not of Despond, but of Despair. Presently we found the road running upon a raised embankment, with two great lakes, spotted with rushy islands on either hand, and be-

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fore us a grim, grey tower, with an ancient gateway—the gates or portcullis long since removed, but a Gothic arch still spanning the roughly-paved causeway. As we rattled beneath it, two or three lounging *douaniers* came forth, and looked lazily at us; and presently we saw the grey walls of Aigues-Mortes rising, massive and square, above the level lines of the marshes, fronted by one lone minaret, called the "Tower of Constance"—a gloomy steeple-prison, where, in the time of the Camisards, a crowd of women were confined—the wives and daughters of the brave Protestants of the Cevennes, who fought their country inch by inch against the dragoons of Louis Quatorze, and who—the prisoners, I mean—were forced to swallow poison by the agents of that right royal and religious king, the pious hero and Champion of the Faith, as it is in the Vatican. Outside the town looks like a mere fortification—you see nothing but the sweep of the massive walls reflected in the stagnant waters which lie dead around them. Not a house-top appears above the ramparts. It is only by the thin swirlings of the wood-fire smoke that you know that human life exists behind that blank and dreary veil of stone. We entered by a deep Gothic arch, and found ourselves in narrow, gloomy, silent streets, the houses grey and ghastly, and many ruinous and deserted. The rotten remnants of the green *jalousies* were mouldering week by week away, and moss and lichens were creeping up the walls; many roofs had fallen, and of some houses only fragments of wall remained. The next moment we were traversing an open space, strewn with rubbish of

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stone, brick, and rotten wood, with patches of dismal garden-ground interspersed, and all round the dim, grey, silent houses, dismal and dead. Aigues-Mortes could, and once did, hold about ten thousand people. It was a city built in whim by a king, the last of the royal crusaders, Louis IX. of France. By him and his immediate descendants, it was esteemed a holy place—the crusading port. The walls built round it, and which still remain—as the empty armour, after the knight who once filled it is dead and gone—were erected in imitation of those of the Egyptian town of Damietta, and all sorts of privileges were granted to the inhabitants. But one privilege the old kings of France could not grant: they could not, by any amount of letters patent, or any seize of seals, confer immunity from fever; and Aigues-Mortes has been dying of ague ever since it was founded. In its early times, the influence of royal favour struggled long and well against disease: one man down, another came on. What loyal Frenchman would refuse to go from hot fits to cold fits of fever, for a certain number of months, and then to his long home, if it were to pleasure a descendant of St. Louis? But the time and the influences of the Holy Wars went by, and the kings of France withdrew their smiles from Aigues-Mortes; so that their royal brother, King Death, had it all his own way. Funerals far outnumbered births or weddings, and gradually the life faded and faded from the stone-girt town, as the ebbing tide leaves a pier. Cette gave it the finishing stroke. A crowd of the inhabitants emigrated *en masse* to Riquet's city; and here now is Aigues-

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Mortes—coffin-like Aigues-Mortes—with about a couple of thousand pallid, shaking mortals, striving their best against the marsh fever, among the ruined houses and within the smouldering walls of this ancient Gothic city.

In a solemn, shady street, I found a decentish hotel, not much above the rank of an auberge, and where I was about as lonely as in the vast caravansary at Bagnerre. The landlord himself—a staid, decent man—waited at my solitary dinner.

"Monsieur," he said, "is an artist, or a poet?"

"What made him think so?"

"Because nobody else ever came to Aigues-Mortes—no traveller ever turned aside across the marshes, to visit their poor old decayed town. There was no trade, no *commis voyageurs*. The people of Nismes and Montpellier were afraid of the fever; and even if they were not, why should they come there? It was no place for pleasure on a holiday—a man would as soon think of amusing himself in a hospital or a morgue, as in Aigues-Mortes."

I inquired more particularly about the fever, for I felt it difficult to conceive how people could continue to remain in a place cursed by nature with a perpetual chronic plague. My host informed me that those who lived well and copiously, were well clothed, well lodged, and under no necessity to be out early and late among the marshes, fared tolerably. They might have an ague-fit now and then, but when once well-seasoned they did pretty well. It was the poorer class who suffered, particularly in spring and autumn, when vegetation was forming and withering, and the

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steaming mists came out thickest over the fens. People seldom died with the first attack; but the subtle disease hung about them, and returned again and again, and wore, and tugged, and exhausted their energies—kept nibbling, in fact, at body and soul, till, in too many cases, the disease-besieged man surrendered, and his soul marched out. I asked again, then, how the poor people remained in such a hot-bed of pestilence? "*Que voulez vous,*" was the reply—"the greater part can't help it; they were born here, and they have a place here;—at Nismes, or Marseilles, or Montpellier, they would have no place. Besides, they are accustomed to it; they look upon fevers as one of the conditions of their lives, like eating and drinking; and, besides, they have no energy for a change. The stuff has been taken out of them; you will see what a sallow, worn-out people we have at Aigues-Mortes. They can get a living here, but they would be overwhelmed anywhere else."

The landlord had previously recommended a *cicerone* to me, assuring me that I would not find him an ordinary man, that he was a sort of half-gentleman, and a scholar, and that he knew everything about Aigues-Mortes better than anybody else in it. Accordingly, I was presently introduced to M. Auguste Saint Jean, an old, very thin man, dressed in rusty black, and wearing—hear it, ye degenerate days!—powdered hair and a queue. M. Saint Jean looked like a broken-down schoolmaster, some touches of pedantry still giving formality to the humble sliding gait, and bent, bowing form. His face was nearly as

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wrinkled as Voltaire's, but he had black eyes which gleamed like a ferret's when you show him a rabbit.

In company with this old gentleman I passed a wandering day in and round Aigues-Mortes, rambling from gate to gate, scrambling up broken stairs to the battlements, and threading our way amid dim lanes, half choked up with rubbish, from one ghastly old tower to another. All this while my guide's tongue was eloquent. He gesticulated like the most fiercely fidgetty member of young France, and the ferret's eye gleamed as though upon a whole warren of rabbits. Aigues-Mortes seemed his one great subject, his one passion, his own idea. Aigues-Mortes was the bride of his enthusiasm, the soul of his body. He had been born in Aigues-Mortes; he had lived in it; he had had the fever in it; and he hoped to die in it, and be buried among the stilly marshes. How well he knew every crumbling stone, every little Gothic bartizan, every relic of an ancient chapel, every gloomy tower haunted by traditions, as it might be by ghosts. His mind flew back every moment to the days of the splendid founding of Aigues-Mortes—to the crusading host, whose glory crowded it with armour, and banners, and cloth of gold, assembled round their king, St. Louis, and bound for Palestine. On the seaward side of the walls, Auguste shewed me rings sunk in the stone, and to these rings, he said, the galleys and caravels of the king had been fastened. The sea is about two miles and a half distant, but the traces of the canal which led to it are still visible amid the marsh and sand, so that, right beneath the walls, upon the smooth, unmoving *aguæ mortes*—whence, of course,

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Aigues-Mortes—floated the fleet of the Crusade, made fast to the ramparts of the fortress of the Crusade. And so Saint Louis sailed with a thousand ships, standing proudly upon the poop, while the bishops round him raised loud Latin chants, and the warriors clashed their harness. The king wore the pilgrim's scrip and the pilgrim's shell. Long and earnestly did my *cicerone* dilate upon the evil fortunes of the Crusade—how, indeed, in the beginning it seemed to prosper, and how Damietta was stormed;—but the Saracens had their turn, and the King of France, and many of his best paladdins were soon prisoners in the Paynim tents. Question of their ransom being raised, "A king of France," said Louis, "is not bought or sold with money. Take a city—a city for a king of France." The sentence and the sentiment are picturesque; but, after all, there is not much in one or the other. However, the followers of Mahound agreed. Louis was restored to France, and Damietta to its former owners; the rest of the European prisoners being thrown into the bargain for eight thousand gold bezants. Saint Louis, however, was too holy and too restless a personage to remain long at home, so that Aigues-Mortes soon saw him again; and this time he departed waving above his head the crown of thorns. The infidels had laid hands on him the first time, but a fiercer enemy now grappled with the king—the plague clutched him; and though a monarch of France could not be bought or sold for any number of gold bezants, the plague had him cheap—in fact, for an old song. "He died," says that bold writer, M. Alexandre Dumas, who spins you off the

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most interesting history, all out of his own head—"he died on a bed of ashes, on the very spot where the messenger of Rome found Marius sitting on the ruins of Carthage"—an interesting topographical fact, seeing that nobody, now-a-days, knows where Carthage stood at all—always saving and excepting M. Alexandre Dumas.

We stood before a grey, massive tower—a Gothic finger of mouldering stone. "Louis de Malagne," said my old *cicerone*, "a traitorous Frenchman, delivered these holy walls to our enemies of Burgundy, and a garrison of the Duke's held possession of the sacred city of Aigues-Mortes. But the sacrilege was fearfully avenged. The oriflamme was spread by the forces of the king, and the townspeople rose within the walls, and, step by step, the foreign garrison were driven back till they fought in a ring round this old tower. They fought well, and died hard, but they did die—every man—always round this old tower. So, when the question came to be, where to fling the corpses, a citizen said, 'This is a town of salt; salt is the harvest of Aigues-Mortes—let us salt the Burgundians.' And another said, 'Truly, there is a cask ready for the meat;' and he pointed to the tower. Then they laid the dead men stark and stiff, as though to floor the tower. Then they heaped salt on them, a layer two feet thick; then they put on another stratum of Burgundian flesh, and another stratum of salt—till the tower was as a cask—choke-full—bursting-full of pickled Burgundians."

Much more he told me of the early fortunes of the Place — how here Francis I. met his enemy,

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Charles V., in solemn conference, each monarch utterly disbelieving every sacred word uttered by the other; and how the celebrated Algerine pirate, Barbarossa, who was the very patriarch of buccaneers — the Abraham of the Mansveldts, and Morgans, and Dampiers, and who invented, and emblazoned upon his flags the famous motto, "The Friend of the Sea, and the Enemy of All who sail upon it"—how this red-bearded rover once cast anchor off the port, and by way of notifying to France that their ally against the Spaniard had arrived, set fire to a wood of Italian pine on the margin of the marshes, and lighted up the whole country by the lurid blaze. Of the Camisards, of whom I was more anxious to hear—of the poisoning in the tower of St. Constance, and of the band of braves who descended from the summit upon tattered strips of blankets—he knew comparatively little. His mind was mediæval. Aigues-Mortes in the day of Louis Quatorze, was a declining place. The glory had gone out of it, and the unappeasable fever was slowly, but surely, claiming its own. Indeed, for a century it had been master. Aigues-Mortes will probably vanish like Gatton and Old Sarum. A pile of ruins, girdled in by crumbling walls, will slowly be invaded by the sleeping waters of the marsh; and the heron, and the duck, and the meek-eyed gull wandering from the sea, will alone flit restlessly over the city built by Louis the Saint, walled by Philip the Bold, and blessed by one of the wisest and the holiest of the Popes.

Reboul, the Nismes poet—I called upon him, but he was from home—is a baker, and lives by

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selling rolls, as Jasmin is a barber, and lives by scraping chins. Reboul is, like M. Auguste Saint Jean, an enthusiastic lover of the poor, dying, fever-struck Gothic town. Let me translate, as well as I may, half-a-dozen couplets in which he characterises the dear city of the Crusades. The poetry is not unlike Victor Hugo's — stern, rich, fanciful, and coloured, like an old cathedral window.

"See, from the stilly waters, and above the sleepy swamp,
Where, steaming up, the fever-fog rolls grim, and grey, and damp:

How the holy, royal city—Aigues-Mortes, that silent town,
Looms like the ghost of Greatness, and of Pride that's been pulled down.

See how its twenty silent towers, with nothing to defend,
Stand up like ancient coffins, all grimly set on end;

With ruins all around them, for, sleeping and at rest,
Lies the life of that old city, like a dead owl in its nest—

Like the shrunken, sodden body, so ghastly and so pale,
Of a warrior who has died, and who has rotted in his mail—

Like the grimly-twisted corpse of a nun within her pall,
Whom they bound, and gagged, and built, all living, in a wall."

From the town, we partially floated, in a boat, and partially toiled through swamp and sand to the sea—Auguste constantly preaching on the antiquarian topography of the place, upon old canals, and middle-aged canals—one obliterating the other; on the route which the galleys of St. Louis followed from the walls to the ocean; on a dreary spot between sand-hills, which he called *les Tombeaux*, and where,

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by his account, the Crusaders who died before the starting of the expedition lie buried in their armour of proof. Then we toiled to a little harbour—a mere fisherman's creek—where it is supposed the ancient canal of St. Louis joined the sea, and which still bears the name of the *Grau Louis*, or the *Grau de Roi* —"grau" being understood to be a corruption of *gradus*. At this spot, rising in the midst of a group of clustered huts, the dwellings of fishermen and agued *douaniers*, one or two of whom were lazily angling off the piers—their chief occupation—there stands a lighthouse, about forty feet high.

"Let us climb to the lantern," said Auguste, "and you will then see our silent land, and our poor dear old fading town lying at our feet."

Accordingly up we went; only poor Auguste stopped every three steps to cough; and before we had got half way, the perspiration came streaming down his yellow face, proving what might have been a matter of dispute before—that he had some moisture somewhere in his body. From the top we both gazed earnestly, and I curiously, around. On one side, the sea, blue—purple blue; on the other side, something which was neither sea nor land—water and swamp—pond and marsh—bulrush thickets, and tamarisk jungles, shooting in peninsular capes, points, and headlands, into the salt sea lakes; in the centre of them—like the ark grounding after the deluge—the grey walls of Aigues-Mortes. Between the great *mare internum* and the lagoons, rolling sand-hills—the barrier-line of the coast—and upon them, but afar off, moving specks—the semi-wild cattle of the

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country; white dots—the Arab-blooded horses which are used for flails; black dots—the wild bulls and cows, which the mounted herdsmen drive with couched lance and flying lasso.

"Is it not beautiful?" murmured Auguste; "I think it so. I was born here. I love this landscape —it is so grand in its flatness; the shore is as grand as the sea. Look, there are distant hills"—pointing to the shadowy outline of the Cevennes—"but the hills are not so glorious as the plain."

"But neither have they the fever of the plain."

"It is God's will. But, fever or no fever, I love this land—so quiet, and still, and solemn—ay, monsieur, as solemn as the deserts of the Arabs, or as a cathedral at midnight—as solemn, and as strange, and as awful, as the early world, fresh from the making, with the birds flying, and the fish swimming, on the evening of the fifth day, before the Lord created Adam."

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CHAPTER XIV.

FLAT MARSH SCENERY, TREATED BY POETS AND PAINTERS—TAVERN ALLEGORIES—NISMES—THE AMPHITHEATRE AND THE MAISON CARRÉE—PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC—THE OLD RELIGIOUS WARS ALIVE STILL—THE SILK WEAVER OF NISMES AND THE DRAGONNÆDES.

As Launcelot Gobbo had an infection to serve Bassanio, so I somehow took ill with an infection to walk, instead of ride, back to Lunel. I suppose that Auguste had innoculated me, in some measure, with his mysterious love for the boundless swamps and primeval jungles of bulrush around; so that I felt a sort of pang in leaving them, and would willingly depart lingeringly and alone. Sending on my small baggage, then, by *roulage,* I strode forth out of the dead city, and was soon pacing alone the echoing causeway, like an Arab steering by the sun in the desert. There is one dead and one living English poet who would have made glorious use of this fen landscape, so repulsive to many, but which did, after all, possess a strange, undefinable attraction for me. The dead poet is Shelley, who had the true eye for sublimity in waste. Take the following picture-touch:—

> "An uninhabited sea-side,
> Which the lone fisher, when his nets are dried,
> Abandons; and no other object breaks
> The waste, but one dwarf tree, and some few stakes,
> Broken and unrepaired; and the tide makes
> A narrow space of level sand thereon."

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This is the sort of landscape, too, which, in another department of art, Collins delighted in representing. But Shelley's picture of the luxuriant rush and water-plant vegetation would have been magnificent. Listen how he handles a theme of the kind:

> "And plants, at whose names the verse feels loath,
> Filled the place with a monstrous undergrowth—
> Prickly and pulpous, and blistering and blue,
> Livid and starred with a lurid dew;
> Spawn-weeds, and filth, and leporous scum,
> Made the running rivulet thick and dumb;
> And at its outlet, flags huge as stakes
> Dammed it up with roots knotted like water-snakes."

Tennyson is the living poet who would picture with equal effect the region of swamp, and rush, and pool. Brought up in a fen district, his eye and feeling for marsh scenery and vegetation are perfect. Remember the marish mosses in the rotting fosse which encircled the "Moated Grange." Musing thus of the Poet Laureate, I would assign to this landscape embodiment of King Death, I passed the half-way tower, where three *douaniers*, seated in chairs, were fishing and looking as glum and silent as their prey, and began to discern the gravelly, shingly land of vines and olives again before me. The clear air of the South cheats us northerns like a mirage. You see objects as near you as in England they would be brought by a very fair spy-glass, and the effect, before you began to make allowances for the atmospheric spectacles, is to put you dreadfully out of humour at the length of the way, before you actually came up with the too distinct goal. So was

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it strongly with me in pedestrianising towards Lunel. Lunel seemed retreating back and back, so that my consolation became that it would be surely stopped by the Cevennes, even if the worst came to the worst; and go where it would, I was determined to come up with it somehow. Entering the region of the vine, the moppy olive, and the dust which was flying about in clouds, I halted at a roadside auberge to wash the latter article out of my throat, and reaped my reward in the sight of a splendid cartoon suspended over the great fireplace, which represented, in a severe allegory, "The Death of Credit killed by bad Payers." The scene was a handsome street, with a great open *café* behind, at the *comptoir* of which sat Madam Commerce aghast at the atrocity being committed before her. In a corner are seen a group of *gardes de commerce*—in the vernacular, bailiffs—lamenting over their ruined occupation. I came to know the profession of these gentlemen, from the fact that their style and titles were legibly imprinted across their waistcoats. In the foreground, the main catastrophe of the composition was proceeding. Credit, represented by a fat, good-natured-looking, elderly gentleman in a blue greatcoat, was stretched supine upon the stones, while his three murderers brandished their weapons above him. The delineation of the culprits was anything but flattering to the three classes of society which I took them to represent. The "first murderer," as they say in *Macbeth*, was a soldier. His sabre was deep in poor Credit's side. The second criminal must have been a musician, for he has just hit Credit a superhuman blow on the

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head with a fiddle—not a very deadly weapon one would suppose; while the third assassin, armed with a billiard cue, seemed to typify the idler portion of the community in general. Between them, however, there could be no doubt that Credit had been fairly done to death—the grim intimation was there to stare all topers in the face.

The fact is, indeed, that all over rural France, in the places of public entertainment, poor M. Credit is in exceedingly bad odour. I have seen dozens of pictorial hints, conveying with more or less delicacy the melancholy moral of that just described. Sometimes, however, the landlord distrusts the pencil, puts no faith in allegory, and stern and prosaic—with a propensity to political economy—and giving rise to dark suspicions of a tendency to the Manchester school, writes up in sturdy letters, grim and hopeless—

"ARGENT COMPTANT."

At other times, cast in a more genial mould, he deviates into what may be called didactic verse—containing, like the "Penny Magazine"—useful knowledge for the people, and hints poetically to his customers, the rule of the establishment—taking care, however, to intimate to their susceptible feelings that generous social impulses, rather than sombre commercial necessity, are at the bottom of the regulation. Thus it is not uncommon to read the following pithy and not particularly rhythmical distich:—

"Pour mieux conserver ses amis,
Ici on ne fait pas de credit."

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At last Lunel was fairly caught, and an hour of the rail brought me to Nismes and to the Hotel de Luxembourg, running out at the windows with swarms of *commis voyageurs*, the greater number connected with the silk trade. One of these worthies beside whom I was placed at dinner, told me that he intended to go to London to the Exhibition, and that he had a very snug plan for securing a competent guide, who would poke up all the lions; this guide to be a "*Marin du port de Londres; car tenez ils sont des galliards futés, les marins du port de Londres.*" I had all the difficulty in the world in making the intending excursionist aware of the probable effects of hiring, as a west-end guide, the first sailor or waterman he picked up at Wapping.

The great features of Nismes are, as every body knows, the features which the Romans left behind them. Provence and Languedoc were the regions of Gaul which the great masters of the world liked best, probably because they were nearest home; and obscure as was the Roman Nismes—for I believe that Nimauses lays claim to no historic dignity whatever—it must still have been a populous and important place: the unmouldering masonry of the Roman builders proves it. I had never seen any Roman remains to speak of, and, to tell the truth, had never been able to work up any great enthusiasm about the fragments of the ancient people which I had come across. I had bathed in all the Roman baths wherewith London abounds, but found no inspiration in the waters—I had stood on grassy mounds of earth, believed to have been Roman camps; traced like the Antiquary,

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the *Ager*, with its corresponding *fossa*—marked the *porta sinistra* and the *porta dextra*—and stood where some hook-nosed general had reclined in the *Pretorium;* but I again confess that my imagination did not fly impulsively back, and bury itself among *patres conscripti*, togas, vestal virgins, lictors, patricians, equites, and plebeians.

And, in fact, such mere vague traces and memorials as baths, bits of pavement, and dusty holes, with smouldering brick-basements, which people call "Roman villas,"—are not at all fitted, whatever would-be classicists may pretend, to stir up the strong tide of enthusiastic association. These are but miserable odds and ends of fragments, from which you can no more leap to the dignity and the grandeur of the Romans, than you could argue, never having seen a man, from finding a cast-away tooth-pick, up to the appearance and nature of the invisible owner. But let us see a great specimen of a great Roman work, and then we are in the right track. Any builder could have made you a bath—any sapper and miner could have traced you out a camp—any of the small architects with whom we are infested could have knocked you up a villa—but give us a characteristic bit of the great people who are dead and gone, and then we can, or, at all events, we will try, to take their measure.

The amphitheatre or arena at Nismes rose on me like a stupendous spectre, and frowned me down. I was smote with the sight. The size appalled me: mightiness—vastness—massiveness were there together—a trinity of stone, rising up, as it were, in the

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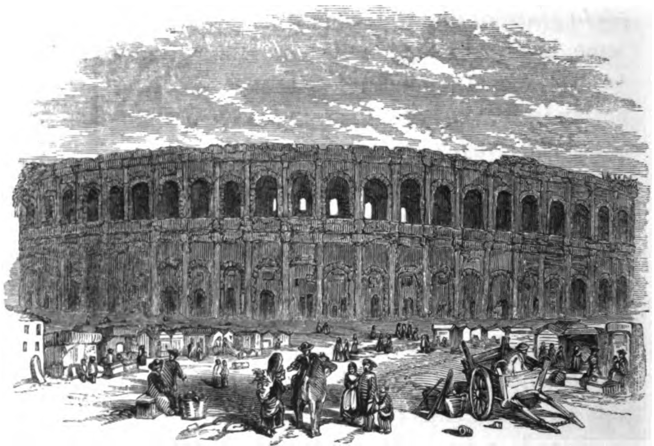

AMPHITHEATRE AT NISMES.

middle of my little preconceived and pet notions, and shivering and dispersing them, as the English three-decker in the *Pilot* came bowling into view, driving away the fog in wreaths before her and around her. First I walked about the great stone skeleton; but though the symmetrical glory of the architecture, its massive regularity, and what I would call soldier-like precision of uniformity, kept urging my mind to look and admire; still the impression of vastness was predominant, and all but drove out other thoughts. And yet it was not until I had entered, that that impression reached its profoundest depth.

As I emerged from the vaulted and cavern-like corridor, through which a garrulous old woman led me, into the blaze of keen sunshine, that fell upon a mighty wilderness of stone; and as instinctively I

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laid my hand upon the nearest ponderous block, the full and perfect idea of size and power closed on me. *Roma!—Antiqua Roma!*—had me in her grasp; and as I felt, I remembered that Eothen had described a similar sensation, as produced by the bigness of the stones of the great pyramid. My old woman having, happily, left me, I was alone within that enormous gulf—that crater of regularly rising stone. Round and round, in ridges where Titans might have sat and seen, megatheria combat mastadons, mounted up the mighty steps of grey, dead stone—sometimes entire for the whole round—sometimes splintered and riven, but never worn, until your eye—now stumbling, as it were, over rubbish-heaps—now striding from stone ledge to stone ledge—rested upon the broken and jagged rim, with a hoary beard of plants and long dry weeds standing rigidly up between you and the blue. I turned again to the detals of the building—to the vastness of the blocks of stone, and to the perfect manipulation which had placed them. If the Romans were great soldiers, they were as great masons. They conquered the world in all pursuits in which enormous energy and iron muscularity of mind could conquer. The universe of earth, and stone, and water was theirs. But they were not cloud compellers. They had none of the great power over the essences of the brain. Beauty was too subtle for them; and they only got it, incidentally, as an element—not a principle. The arena in which I stood was sternly beautiful; but it was the beauty of a legion drawn up for battle—iron to the back-bone—iron to the teeth—the beauty of

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that rigid symmetric inflexibility which sat upon the bronze faces which, when Hannibal, encamped on Roman ground set up for sale, and grimly and unmovedly saw bought, at the common market rate, the patch of earth on which the Carthaginian lay entrenched.

I remained in the amphitheatre for hours—now descending to the arena, where the men and beasts fought and tore each other—now scrambling to the highest ridge, and watching, with a calmness which soothed and lulled the mind, the vast bowl which lay beneath—so massive, so silent, and so grey. You can still trace the two posts of honour—the royal boxes, as it were—low down in the ring, and marked out by stone barriers from the general sweep. Each of them has an exclusive corridor sunk in the massive stone; and behind each are vaulted cells, which you will be told were used as guard-houses by the escort of soldiers or lictors. Tradition assigns one of these boxes to the proconsul—the other to the vestal virgins; but the latter, if I remember my Roman antiquities aright, could have no business out of Rome. There were no subsidiary sacred fire-branch establishments, like provincial banks, to promulgate the credit of the "central office,"—kindled in the remote part of the empire. The holy flame burnt only before the mystic palladium, which answered for the security of Rome. Whoever occupied the boxes in question, however, were no doubt what one of Captain Marryatt's characters describes the Smith family to be in London—"quite the topping people of the place;" and up to them, no doubt, after the gladiator had received the steel of his an-

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tagonist, and the thundering shout of "Habet!" had died away, the poor Scythian, or Roman, as the case might be, turned a sadly inquiring eye—intent upon the hands of the great personages on whom his doom depended—on the upturned or the downturned thumb. A very interesting portion of the arena is the labyrinth of corridors, passages, and stairs, which honeycomb its massive masonry, and into which, in the event of a shower, the whole body of spectators could at once retreat, leaving the great circles of stone as deserted as at midnight. So admirable, too, are the arrangements, that there could have been very little crowding. The vomitories get wider and wider as they approach the entrance, where the people would emerge on every side, like the drops of water flung off by the rotatory motion of a mop. There was an odd resemblance to the general disposition of the opera corridors and staircases, which struck me in the arrangement of the lobbies and passages behind. One could fancy the young Roman men about Nemauses, in their scented tunics, clasped with glittering stones and their broad purple girdles—the Tyrian hue, as the poets say—gathering in knots, and discussing a blow which had split a fellow-creature's head open, as our own opera elegants might Grisi's celebrated holding-note in *Norma*, or Duprez' famous *ut du poitrine*. The execution of a *débutant* with the sword might be praised, as the execution now-a-days of a *prima donna*. Rumours might be discussed of a new net-and-trident man picked up in some obscure arena, as the *cognoscenti* now whisper the reported merits of a tenor discovered in Barcelona

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or Palermo; and the *habitués* would delight to inform each other that the spirited and enterprising management had secured the services of the celebrated Berbix, whose career at Massilia, for instance, had excited such admiration—the *artiste* having killed fifteen antagonists in less than a fortnight. And then, after the pleasant and critical chat between the acts, the trumpets would again sound, and all the world would turn out upon the vast stone benches—the nobles and wealthy nearest the ring, as in the stalls with us, and the lower and slave population high up on the further benches, like the humble folks and the footmen in the gallery—and then would recommence that exhibition of which the Romans could never have enough, and of which they never tired—the excitement of the shedding of blood.

From the arena I walked slowly on to the Maison Carrée. All the great Roman remains lie upon the open Boulevard, on the edge of the stacked and crowded old town, while without the circle rise the spacious streets of new *quartiers* for the rich, and many a long straggling suburb, where, in mean garrets and unwholesome cellars, the poor handloom weavers produce webs of gorgeous silk which rival the choicest products of Lyons. Presently, to the left, appeared a horribly clumsy theatre; and, to the right, the wondrous Maison Carrée. The day of which I am writing was certainly my day of architectural sensation. First, Rome, with her hugeness and her symmetric strength, gripped me; and now, Greece, with her pure and etherial beauty, which is essentially of the spirit, enthralled me. The Maison

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Carrée was, no doubt, built by Roman hands, but entirely after Greek models. It is wholly of Athens: not at all of Rome—a Corinthian temple of the purest taste and divinest beauty—small, slight, without an atom of the ponderous majesty of the arena—reigning by love and smiles, like Venus; not by frowns and thunder, like Jove. Cardinal Alberoni said that the Maison Carrée was a gem which ought to be set in gold; and the two great Jupiters of France—Louis Quatorze and Napoleon—had both of them schemes for lifting the temple bodily out of the ground and carrying it to Paris. The building is perfectly simple—merely an oblong square, with a portico, and fluted Corinthian pillars—yet the loveliness of it is like enchantment. The essence of its power over the senses appears to me to consist in an exquisite subtlety of proportion, which amounts to the very highest grace and the very purest and truest beauty. How many *quasi* Grecian buildings had I seen—all porticoed and caryatided—without a sensation, save that the pile before me was cold and perhaps correct —a sort of stone formulary. I had begun to fear that Greek beauty was too subtle for me, or that Greek beauty was cant, when the Maison Carrée in a moment utterly undeceived me. The puzzle was solved: I had never seen Grecian architecture before. The things which our domestic Pecksniffs call Grecian—their St. Martin's porticoes, and St. Pancras churches —bear about the same relation to the divine original, as the old statue of George IV. at King's Cross to the Apollo Belvidere. Of course, these gentry—of whom we assuredly know none whose powers qualify them

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to grapple with a higher task than a dock-warehouse or a railway tavern—have picked all manner of faults in the divine proportions of this wondrous edifice. There is some bricklaying cant about a departure from the proportions of Vitruvius, which, I presume, are faithfully observed in the National Gallery, and some modification of them, no doubt, in the Pavilion at Brighton—which variations are gravely censured in the Maison Carrée; while, in order, doubtless, to shew our modern superiority, the French hodmen have erected a theatre just opposite the Corinthian temple, with a portico—heavens and earth! such a portico—a mass of mathematical clumsiness, with pillars like the legs of aldermen suffering from dropsy. Anything more intensely ugly is not to be found in Christendom. It actually beats the worst monstrosity of London; and this dreadful caricature of the deathless work of the glorious Greeks is erected right opposite to, perhaps, the most perfect piece of building and stone-carving in the world.

I believe that it requires neither art-training nor classic knowledge to enjoy the unearthly beauty of the Corinthian temple. Give me a healthy-minded youth, who has never heard of Alcibiades, Themistocles, Socrates, or Æschylus, but who has the natural appreciation of beauty—who can admire the droop of a lily, the spring of a deer, the flight of an eagle—set him opposite the Maison Carrée, and the sensation of divine, transcendant beauty, will rush into his heart and brain, as when contemplating the flower, or beast or bird. The big man in the parish at home will point you out the graces of the new church of St.

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Kold Without, designed after the antique manner, by the celebrated Mr. Jones Smith, and because you hesitate to acknowledge them, will read you a benignant lecture on the impossibility of making people, with uneducated taste, fully appreciate what he will be sure to call the "severity" of Greek architecture; the worthy man himself having been dinned with the apocryphal loveliness in question until he has come actually to believe in it. Never mind the grave sermons preached about educating and training taste. An educated and trained taste will, no doubt, admire with even more fond appreciation and far higher enjoyment; but he who cannot, at the first glance, see and feel the perfect grace of pure Grecian art, must be insensible to the blue of the sky, to the beauty of running water, to the song of the birds and the silver radiance of moonlight. I never revisited the amphitheatre while I remained in Nismes, but I haunted the temple. The grandeur, and the massiveness of the Roman work, was like the north wind. It rudely buffeted the wayfarer, but he clung to his cloak. The Grecian trophy shone out like the gentle sun, and the traveller doffed mantle and cap to pay it adoration.

Nismes, as most people know, is one of the points of France where Protestantism and Catholicism still glare upon each other with hostile and threatening eyes. The old Catholic and Huguenot hatred has descended lineally from the remote times of the Albigenses, and at this moment broods as bitterly over the olive city as when Raymond of Toulouse proclaimed a crusade against the Paulician heretics, and twenty

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thousand people were slaughtered under the pastoral care of the Bishop of Beziers. That the animosity, however, has not died out centuries ago, we have to thank the pious precautions of Louis XIV., Madame de Maintenon, and the priest, who waged as bitter war upon the Huguenots of the Cevennes as ever their fathers of these same mountains had been exposed to. The dragoonades are still fiercely remembered in the South. The old-world stories in Scotland of the cruelties of Claverhouse and his life-guards, have well-nigh ceased to excite anything like personal bitterness; but in portions of Languedoc, the animosity between neighbour and neighbour—Catholic and Protestant—is still deepened and widened by the oft-told legends of those wretched religious wars. Nismes is the head quarters of the sectarianism—Catholics and Protestants are drawn up in two compacted hostile bodies, living, for the most part, in separate *quartiers;* marrying each party within itself; scandalising each party the other whenever it has a chance; and carrying, indeed, the party spirit so far as absolutely to have established Protestant *cafés* and Catholic *cafés,* the *habitués* of which will no more enter the rival establishments than they would enter the opposition churches.

The day after my arrival, I had a singular opportunity of becoming acquainted with the spirit of the place. North from Nismes rises a species of chaos of steep hills and deep valleys, or rather ravines, composed almost entirely of shingle and rock, covered over, however, with olive-groves and vines, and dotted with little white summer-houses, to which almost the

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entire middle and working class population retire upon Sundays to pass the day, partly in cultivating their patches of land—there is hardly a family without an allotment—and partly to amuse themselves after the toils of the week. Rambling among these rugged hills and dales, I chanced to ask my way of a person I met descending towards Nismes. He was a tall, ungainly, raw-boned man—pallid and worn, as if with sedentary labour; but he seemed intelligent, and was very polite—pointing out a number of localities around. Presently, he told me that he had been up to his *cabane*, or summer-house; that he was a silk-weaver in Nismes; that his wages were so poor, that he had a hard struggle to live; but that he still managed to give up an hour's work or so a-day to go and feed his rabbits at the *cabane*. As we talked, he inquired whether I were not a foreigner—an Englishman—and, with some hesitation, but with great eagerness—a Protestant? My affirmative answer to the last interrogatory produced a magical effect. The man's face actually gleamed. He jumped off the ground, let fall his apronful of melons and fresh figs, while he clutched both of my hands in his, and exclaimed, "A Protestant! *Dieu merci! Dieu merci!* an English Protestant! Oh, how glad I am to see an English Protestant! Listen, monsieur. We are here. We of the religion (the old phrase—as old as Rosny and Coligni), we are here fifteen thousand strong—fifteen thousand, monsieur. Do n't believe those who say only ten. Fifteen thousand, monsieur—good men and true. All ready—all standing by one another—all *braves*—all on the *qui vive*—all prepared,

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if the hour should come. We know each other—we love each other, and we hate"—a pause; then, with a significant grin—"*les autres.* You will tell that, in England, monsieur, to our brothers. Fifteen thousand, monsieur; and every man, woman, and child, true to the cause and the faith."

The whole tone of the orator did not appear to me to be so much a matter of religious bitterness, as it marked a hatred of race. The two contending parties at Nismes were evidently of different blood: their religious animosities had gradually divided them into two distinct and hostile peoples.

"See!" said the weaver; "this is the Protestant side of the valley,—all Protestants here. Not a Catholic *cabane*—no, no! they must go elsewhere, —we have nothing to do with them,—we shake off the dust of our feet upon them and theirs. You and I are one, upon our own ground—Protestant ground —staunch and true;" and he stamped with his foot upon the pebbles. "Monsieur must absolutely go with me to my *cabane*, and drink a glass of wine to the good cause; and see my rabbits—Protestant rabbits."

Who could resist this last attraction? We turned and toiled up the flinty paths together; my acquaintance informing me, with great pride, that M. Guizot was a good Protestant of Nismes, as his father, who had fallen, *dans le terreur*, was before him. He understood that M. Guizot was then in England, and he was sure that he would be delighted at seeing such a fine Protestant country, and such a staunch Protestant people. Stopping at length at an un-

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painted door, in the rough, unmortared wall, my friend opened it, and we stepped into a little patch of garden, planted with olives and straggling vine-bushes. "They are much better cultivated, and give better oil and better wine," he said, "than the Catholic grounds;" and I am sure he believed the asseveration. Having duly inspected the "Protestant rabbits," we entered the *cabane*, a bare, rough, white-washed room, with a table, a few chairs, and unglazed lattices. Unless when the mistral blows, the open air is seldom or never unpleasant; and then wooden shutters are applied to the windward side of the houses. On this occasion, however, there was not a breath stirring amid the silvery grey leaves of the olives. The grasshoppers—fellows of a size which would astound Sir Thomas Gresham—chirped and leaped in the grass at the foot of the wall; scores and scores of lithe, yellow lizards, with the blackest of eyes, flashed up and down over the rough stones, and shot in and out of the crevices; but, excepting these sights and sounds, all around was hushed and motionless; and the sun, wintry though it was, flooded all the still, brown valley with a deluge of pure, hot light.

The weaver filled a very comfortable couple of glasses with a small, but not ill-tasted, wine. "Here's to ——;" he uttered a sentiment not complimentary to the Catholic Church, and, indeed, consigning it to the warmest of quarters, and took off his liquor with undeniable unction. I need not say whether I drunk the toast: anyhow, I drunk the wine.

"And now look there," continued my host, pointing with his empty glass through the open

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CHAPTER THE LAST.

AGRICULTURE IN FRANCE—ITS BACKWARD STATE—CENTRALISING TENDENCY—SUBDIVISION OF PROPERTY—ITS EFFECTS—FRENCH "ENCUMBERÉD ESTATES."

IN the foregoing pages I have sketched, with as much regard to a readable liveliness, and to vivid local colouring as I could command, the features and incidents of part—the most interesting one—of an extended journey through France. My primary purpose in undertaking the latter was, to prepare a view of the social and agricultural condition of the peasantry, for publication in the columns of the *Morning Chronicle;* and accordingly a series of letters, devoted to that important subject, duly appeared. These communications, however, were necessarily confined to statements of agricultural progress, and the investigation of solid social subjects, to the exclusion of those matters of personal incident and artistic, literary, and legendary significance, which naturally occur in the prosecution of a desultory and inquiring journey. To this latter field—that of the tourist rather than the commissioner—then, I have devoted the foregoing chapters; but I am unwilling to send them forth without appending to them—extracted from my concluding Letter in the *Morning Chronicle* —a summary of my impressions of the social condition of the French agricultural population, and the effects of the system of the infinitesimal division of

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the land. These impressions are founded upon a five months' journey through France, keeping mainly in the country places, being constantly in communication with the people themselves, and hearing also the opinions of the priests and men of business engaged in rural affairs, as well as reading authors upon all sides of the question. My conclusions I have summed up carefully, and with great deliberation; and I offer them as an honest, and not ill-founded estimate of the present state and future prospects of rural France.

The French are undoubtedly at least a century behind us in agricultural science and skill. This remark applies alike to breeding cattle and to raising crops. Agriculture in France is rather a handicraft than what it ought to be—a science. As a general rule, the farmers of France are about on a level with the ploughmen of England. When I say this, I mean that the immense majority of the cultivators are unlettered peasants—hinds—who till the land in the unvarying, mechanical routine handed down to them from their forefathers. Of agriculture, in any other sense than the rule-of-thumb practice of ploughing, sowing, reaping, and threshing, they know literally nothing. Of the *rationale* of the management of land—of the reasons why so and so should be done—they think no more than honest La Balafrè, whose only notion of a final cause was the command of his superior officer. Thus they are bound down in the most abject submission to every custom, for no other reason than that it is a custom: their fathers did so and so, and therefore, and for no other reason,

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the sons do the same. I could see no struggling upwards, no longing for a better condition, no discontent, even with the vegetable food upon which they lived. All over the land there brooded one almost unvaried mist of dull, unenlightened, passive content—I do not mean social—but industrial content.

There are two causes principally chargeable with this. In the first place, strange as it may seem in a country in which two-thirds of the population are agriculturists, agriculture is a very unhonoured occupation. Develop, in the slightest degree, a Frenchman's mental faculties, and he flies to a town as surely as steel filings fly to a loadstone. He has no rural tastes—no delight in rural habits. A French amateur farmer would, indeed, be a sight to see. Again, this national tendency is directly encouraged by the centralizing system of government—by the multitude of officials, and by the payment of all functionaries. From all parts of France, men of great energy and resource struggle up and fling themselves on the world of Paris. There they try to become great functionaries. Through every department of the eighty-four, men of less energy and resource struggle up to the *chef-lieu*—the provincial capital. There they try to become little functionaries. Go still lower—deal with a still smaller scale—and the result will be the same. As is the department to France, so is the arrondissement to the department, and the commune to the arrondissement. Nine-tenths of those who have, or think they have, heads on their shoulders, struggle into towns to fight for office. Nine-tenths of those who are, or are deemed

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by themselves or others, too stupid for anything else, are left at home to till the fields, and breed the cattle, and prune the vines, as their ancestors did for generations before them. Thus there is singularly little intelligence left in the country. The whole energy, and knowledge, and resource of the land are barrelled up in the towns. You leave one city, and, in many cases, you will not meet an educated or cultivated individual until you arrive at another—all between is utter intellectual barrenness. The English country gentleman, we all know, is not a faultless character, but his useful qualities far prevail over his defects; and it is only when traversing a land all but destitute of any such order that the fatal effects of the blank are fully realized. Were there more country gentlemen in France, there would be more animal food and more wheaten bread in the country. The very idea of a great proprietor living upon his estates implies the fact of an educated person—an individual more or less rubbed and polished and enlightened by society—taking his place amongst a class who must naturally look up to him, and whose mass he must necessarily, to a greater or less degree, leaven. It is easy to joke about English country gentlemen—about their foibles, and prejudices, and absurd points; but to the jokers I would seriously say, "Go to France; examine its agriculture, and the structure and calibre of its rural society, and see the result of the utter absence of a class of men—certainly not Solomons, and as certainly not Chesterfields, but, for all that, most useful personages—individuals with capital, with, at all events, a certain degree of enlightenment

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—taking an active interest in farming—often amateur farmers themselves—the patrons of district clubs, and ploughing matches, and cattle-shows—and, above all, living daily among their tenantry, and having an active and direct interest in that tenantry's prosperity." I do not mean to say that here and there, all over France, there may not be found active and intelligent resident landlords, nor that, in the north of France, there may not be discovered intelligent and clear-headed tenant-farmers; but the rule is as I have stated. Utterly ignorant boors are allowed to plod on from generation to generation, wrapped in the most dismal mists of agricultural superstition; while what in America would be called the "smart" part of the population, are intriguing, and constructing and undoing *complots*, in the towns. To all present appearance, a score of dynasties may succeed each other in France before La Vendée takes its place beside Norfolk, or before Limousin rivals the Lothian s.

A word as to the subdivision of property. I know the extreme difficulties of the subject, and the moral considerations which, in connection with it, are often placed in opposition to admitted physical and economical disadvantages. I shall, therefore, without discussing the question at any length, mention two or three personally ascertained facts:—

The tendency of landed properties, under the system in question, is to continual diminution of seize.

This tendency does *not* stop with the interests of the parties concerned—it goes on in spite of them.

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And the only practical check is nothing but a new evil. When a man finds that his patch of land is insufficient to support his family, he borrows money and buys more land. In nine cases out of ten, the interest to be paid to the lender is greater than the profit which the borrower can extract from the land—and bankruptcy, and reduction to the condition of a day-labourer, is sooner or later the inevitable result.

The infinitesimal patches of land are cultivated in the most rude and uneconomical fashion. Not a franc of capital, further than that sunk in the purchase of spades, picks, and hoes, is expended on them. They are undrained, ill-manured, expensively worked, and they would often produce no profit whatever, were it not that the proprietor is the labourer, and that he looks for little or nothing save a recompense for his toil in a bare subsistence. It is easy to see how the consumer must fare if the producer possess little or no surplus after his own necessities are satisfied.

It is not to be supposed from the above remarks, that I conceive that in no circumstances, and under no conditions, can the soil be advantageously divided into minute properties. The rule which strikes me as applying to the matter is this:—where spade-husbandry, can be legitimately adopted, then the extreme subdivision of land loses much, if not all, of its evils. The reason is plain: spade-husbandry, while it pays the proprietor fair wages, also, in certain cases, develops in an economical manner the resources of the soil. The instance of market-gardens

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near a populous town is a case in point. But in a remote district, removed from markets, ill provided with the means of locomotion—where cereals, not vegetables, must be raised—spade-labour is so far mere toil flung away. Near Nismes I found a man digging a field which ought to have been ploughed. He told me that the spade produced more than the plough. Then why did not the farmers use spade-husbandry? "Because, although spade-husbandry was very productive, it was still more expensive. It paid a small proprietor who could do the work himself, but not a large proprietor, who had to remunerate his labourers." Herein, then, lies the fallacy. Truly considered, a mode of cultivation unprofitable for the great proprietor, must be unprofitable, in the long run, for the small proprietor also. The former, by spade-husbandry, loses his profit by paying extravagantly for labour; the latter must pay for labour as well, but he pays himself, and is therefore unconscious of the outlay—an outlay which is, nevertheless, not the less real. If the plough, at an expense of 5*s*., can produce 20*s*. worth of produce—and if the spade, at an expense of 20*s*., can produce 30*s*. worth of produce—the difference between the proportionate outlays is so much deducted from the resources of the country in which the transaction takes place; and this because that difference of labour, or of money representing labour, if otherwise applied—as by the agency of the plough it would be free to be applied—might, profitably to its proprietor, still raise the sum total of the production to the stated amount of 30*s*.

Are small properties, then, in cases in which

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spade-husbandry cannot be economically applied, injurious to the social and industrial interests of the community in which they exist?

The following propositions appear to me to sum up what may be said on either side of the question:

Small landed holdings undoubtedly tend to produce an industrious population. A man always works hardest for himself.

Small landed holdings tend to breed a spirit of independence, and wholesome moral self-appreciation and reliance.

On the other hand—

Small landed holdings, by breeding a poor and ignorant race of proprietors, keep back agriculture, and injure the whole community of consumers; and—

Small landed holdings tend to grow smaller than it is the interest of their owners that they should become. Capital, borrowed at usurious rates of interest, is then had recourse to for the purpose of enlarging individual properties—and the result is the production of a race of involved, mortgaged, and frequently bankrupt proprietors.

At this present moment, I believe the proprietorship of France to be as bankrupt as that of the south-west of Ireland. The number of "Encumbered Estates" across the Channel would stagger the stoutest calculator. The capitalists, notaries, land-agents, and others in the towns, and not the peasantry, are the real owners of the mortgaged soil. The nominal proprietors are sinking deeper and deeper at every struggle, and they see no hope before them—save one—Socialism. French Socialism is simply the

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result of French poverty. A ruined labourer has no resource but casual charity. No law stands between him and starvation. He has no right to his life unless he can support himself; and as the ponderous machine of the law gradually grinds down his property to an extent too small for him to exist on, and as the increasing interest swallows up the comparatively diminishing products, he sees nothing for it but a scramble. There is property—there is food—and it will go hard but he shall have a share of them. Herein is the whole problem of the dreaded Socialism. I cannot put the matter better than in the words of the old song—

> "Moll in the wad and I fell out,
> And this is what it was all about,
> She had money, and I had none,
> And that was the way the row begun."

Whether a Poor-law, and a change in the law of heritage might not check the evil, I am not, of course, going to inquire; but the present state of rural France—all political considerations left aside—appears to me to point to the possibility, if not the probability, of the world seeing a greater and bloodier *Jacquerie* yet than it ever saw before.

THE END.

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